

Nelly Bekus



STRUGGLE OVER IDENTITY

THE OFFICIAL and
THE ALTERNATIVE
"BELARUSIANNESS"

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*The Official and the Alternative
“Belarusianness”*

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“Belarusianness”*

NELLY BEKUS



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In his essay *Nasha Zdrada* (“Our Betrayal”), the Belarusian writer Pyatro Vasyuchenka writes about the strange phenomenon of “betrayal” in the existence of the Belarusian people:

An elderly lady asks me:

“Pyatro, why were there so many traitors among your Belarusians during the war?”

A young lady says categorically about Vasil Bykau:

“He has left [...] betrayed us.”

Mr. Khazbulatov, after the suppression of the August 1991 putsch states with dismay:

“Belarus has betrayed us.”

I know what to tell these ladies and gentlemen. [...] I can say that [...] we have betrayed Bykau, Bykau has not betrayed us.”¹

During the past fifteen years in Belarus, a situation has emerged in which one part of society has the impression that the other part has betrayed it, while this other part considers the first part as traitors. Both consider themselves true Belarusians, both are certain that the other has betrayed Belarus and the Belarusian idea. In a way, both have reason for their positions. Supporters of the current Belarusian authorities, indeed, “betray” the proponents of opposition ideas of Belarusian development. At the same time, one can see definite truth in the fact that those who fight for “European” Belarus “betray” the official notion of the Belarusian nation. Simultaneously, however, each party remains faithful to itself and to the idea of the Belarusian nation that has shaped their self-perception: their Belarusian identity.

According to the results of opinion polls carried out by the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies (IISEPS),² during

1 Pyatro Vasyuchenka, “Nasha zdrada,” *Fragmenty*, nos. 1–2 (2000): 208.

2 “Okonchatelnye itogi prezidetskikh vyborov,” *Arkhiv analitiki Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies (IISEPS)*, April 2006, www.iiseps.org/4-06-7.html.

the 2006 presidential elections, about 54 percent of the electorate voted for the current president (83 percent according to Central Election Committee data). In other words, due to manipulation during the elections the support of the authorities was overstated, but not entirely falsified. Hence the question: why resort to manipulation, if the current authorities would have attained the majority of votes without it? What is the meaning of the difference between 58 percent—estimated real support for the president—and 83 percent—officially declared support? A possible answer is that while the difference in the figures does not affect the final election results, it significantly changes the political map of Belarusian society. The figure of 83 percent allows the authorities to speak in favor of the monolithic state of Belarusian society—that it is almost entirely “on this side” of the political divide. Such an impressive percentage may testify to the complete and unconditional adequacy of the *Belarusianness* ideology formulated by the authorities. At the same time, the figure of 58 percent, though testifying to numerical superiority, also manifests a political split in society. It points to a substantial segment of society that falls outside of the sphere of influence of official ideology and seeks alternative ways of political and cultural self-definition.

The present work aims to reveal post-communist Belarus as a public and cultural space in which a “struggle over identity” between official and opposition discourses takes place and in which both discourses claim their right to be the only voice of genuine *Belarusianness*.³

Two concepts of the Belarusian nation are the source of a profound division in Belarusian society. It is not only split along the lines of political values and socioeconomic development strategies, but this split also influences the system of collective self-determination of “Belarusians as Belarusians.” Each Belarusian idea, both official and alternative, is articulated and manifested in the public space according to a definite logic of nation building. Each resorts to historical discourse to create the foundation of Belarusian tradition. This tradition, in turn, establishes a historical alibi for a given strategy of formulating a modern image of *Belarusianness*, the selection of geopolitical guidelines, and the system of socio-cultural values. Thus, behind the screen of the political struggle between the official authorities and the opposition lies a struggle for Belarusian identity, for the right to set up its civilizational parameters and to establish the trajectory of its further develop-

3 “*Belarusianness*” is understood here as a set of axiological criteria, historical ideas, and geopolitical orientations that sum up the essence of the Belarusian nation in a definite political and cultural conception.

ment. “We are fighting not so much for power, as for the future,” said Alaksandar Milinkevich, leader of the united democratic forces of Belarus during the 2006 presidential campaign.

First, I am interested in presenting an ideological design of the two concepts of Belarusianness in political discourse; second, their substantiation via the tradition raised by the corresponding historical narratives; and finally, the logic of their public and cultural manifestations. These points dictate the specific character of this work, with reference to various levels of Belarusianness: political, historical, and cultural.

The work consists of six parts. Part I focuses on the methodological basis of the study with respect to contemporary theories of nations. Considering the numerous works on this topic, it has proved impossible to present a meticulous analysis of existing definitions of nations in the context of this research. I thus confine the study to a designation of those approaches that appear to be the most methodologically significant in the context of Belarusian studies. An analysis of the phenomenon of coexisting dual concepts of Belarusianness can hardly be built on a separate model of nation study. Instead, I aim to apply aspects of both the ethnocultural and modernist schools, and also the theory of nationalism of small nations by M. Hroch,⁴ to investigate their explanatory value for the research. Part I contains discussions of such issues as the ontological status of a nation in different theories of nation, the relationship between nation and state, and the specific characteristics of nationalism within post-socialist ideological frameworks. The ultimate task of the research is to show the operation of various strategies of articulation and manifestation of a national idea in the case of official and alternative Belarusianness.

Analysis of the conflict of USSR national policy interpretations among the schools of Sovietology in the context of the above theories of nationalism has revealed an intriguing rule: a positive evaluation of the soviet nation-building experience tends to be natural for followers of the modernist approach in nation study. From this point of view, for all of the decades of Soviet history, the USSR actually played its usual role—creating “national constructions” with educational systems, media, civil rituals, and so on at its disposal. The creation of a Soviet community was thus analogous to other nation-making projects, with the exception that the Soviet state did not attempt to build a unified nation similar to other big nations,

4 Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

but was engrossed in institutionalization of the numerous nations on its territory, a phenomenon that Ian Bremmer calls “matrioshka nationalism.” This constructivist approach to nation building within the Soviet state is significant for a complete understanding of post-Soviet Belarusian development.

At the same time, to understand how different aspects of the national idea have become injected into the concept of *Belarusianness*, and in what way they are used in contemporary nationalistic discourse and official ideology, it is necessary to examine the historical foundation of the national idea in the early twentieth century as well as the specific characteristics of its articulation in view of the features of the historical period. The Belarusian national idea (i.e., the laying of foundations for the symbolic matrix that Belarusians still apply today) was born at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. This historical period saw the expansion of the socialist and social-democratic movements that left ideas of class struggle at the forefront of the European political arena. Thus, the Belarusian national movement was attached to a social movement from the very beginning. The progressive ideas of social existence, such as social “equalization” and other elements of socialist ideology, were inscribed into the cultural model of “*Belarusianness*” as such. Part II of this study is devoted to all of these issues related to the history of development of the Belarusian nation before and after the October Revolution of 1917. It reveals the beginnings of Belarusian nationalism in the Russian empire and the nation’s existence within the Soviet Union.

Today, adherents of the opposition idea of the Belarusian nation insist that the process of nation building, initiated by the first Belarusian nationalists, was interrupted by the 1917 October Revolution and the Soviet state. They view the Soviet period of Belarusian history as a period of colonial submission, and contemporary Belarus as a post-colonial formation. Within the framework of the official ideology, though, the Soviet period is regarded as a period of intensive nation building carried out by the Soviet state and its institutions.

These conflicting interpretations of the Soviet past and its significance in the process of Belarusian nation building in the official and alternative discourses of *Belarusianness* have actually led to the difference of opinions on the interpretation of the Soviet state and its national policy that would later be found in Western Sovietology. The tradition of interpreting the USSR as a colonial empire (the onset of which was manifested by Richard Pipes’s book *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917–1923*) was in contrast to theories that saw the Soviet state as

“almost all effectively multinational.”⁵ In these theories, authors view the Soviet state as a quite positive experience in settling national problems behind the veil of the totalitarian political system, and the Soviet Union is perceived here as an “affirmative action empire” (Terry Martin’s notion). Their conclusions are based on a thorough analysis of Soviet modernization as an analogue, and at the same time as an alternative, to Western modernization (Suny and Martin),⁶ and analysis of the process of institutionalization of national units that once belonged to the USSR (Brubaker).⁷ The supposition that Soviet national policy led to the formation of a definite format of national identity (but not to its obliteration and annihilation) allows us to evaluate the status and positions of both the official and alternative models of the Belarusian nation in modern society very differently.

Part III is devoted to a description of Belarusian post-communism as a new epoch of national and state development. It formulates a general notion of ongoing sociopolitical and economic processes in the country over the past fifteen years. It includes references to the work of Belarusian authors, data obtained through independent polls, and a wealth of articles by Western and Belarusian researchers on the Belarusian issue. The nature of the Belarusian experience in its triple transition, the prerequisites of democratization and authoritarianism (numerous authors cover the presence of both in Belarusian society), the role of the Soviet legacy, and the responsibility of the political elite are the topics that have enabled me to outline the systemic changes in Belarusian society that resulted in the establishment of an authoritarian regime in the independent Republic of Belarus. In Part III, I also present various approaches to the condition of society that already appear in extant literature on Belarus.

Part IV shows the role of Belarusian nationalism in analysis of the Belarusian post-communist scenario. Many authors believe that nationalism as a state of society’s self-consciousness, as a political ideology, and, finally, as the groundwork of a political movement is one of the key factors of Belarusian post-communist development. The absolute majority of authors quoted build their perception of Belarusian reality based on the

5 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 168.

6 Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalisms in the Soviet Union 1923–1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001); Ronald G Suny, *The Revenge of the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

7 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the Nationalism Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

thesis of weakness of the Belarusian idea and the absence of national identity among the majority of Belarusians. I dwell on the arguments and paradoxes of such a diagnosis of Belarusian identity in Chapters 12–14 of this Part. Rejecting the cliché thesis of “weak identity and underdeveloped nationalism” this research is based on an alternative thesis of the coexistence of two parallel concepts of Belarusianness, which I believe more accurately mirrors the current state of the Belarusian people and allows a different interpretation of the interconnection between the democratization and nationalization of Belarusian society.

Part V is devoted to the description of various forms of representation of official and alternative Belarusianness and their competition for the minds of Belarusians. It also describes the specific features of the Belarusian public sphere, or rather two “public spheres,” divided by the invisible ideological wall. Each sphere functions on the basis of its own sources of information, its own social organizations, and two different cultural spheres. It shows the informational background against which appears the struggle over national identity between official and oppositional political discourses. The image of “Belarusianness” on which an appropriate political ideology is built was obtained from official Belarusian ideology, on the one hand, and oppositional political ideologies, on the other hand. In selecting texts for comparative analysis, the main criterion was the presence of the “national idea” as a political issue. The selected texts deal with defining the Belarusian nation, describing the national idea, designating Belarus’s civilizational orientation, and so on. In the official political discourse, such material includes public speeches by the Belarusian president, publications in *Sovietskaia Belorussia* (the daily mouthpiece of Belarusian state ideology) by leading ideologists, and university textbooks on state ideology. Articles by political leaders and political scientists from the opposition camp and manifestos of the main opposition political parties form the main source material for the political concept of alternative Belarusianness.

Official and alternative political discourses rest upon their own versions of Belarusian historical tradition. For the purposes of this research, it was important to compare the strategies of the creation of a definite image of the Belarusian nation with the help of a definite interpretation of Belarusian history. Furthermore, it was significant to contrast the instrumental possibilities of the official and alternative versions of history, in the first place, and their presence in the educational system. Common “Histories of Belarus:” university textbooks (in the case of official history) and books

aimed toward a wide readership and openly educational (in the case of alternative history) were used as the material for comparison to provide a picture of two visions of the Belarusian past by historians working in different cultural and political camps. However, the main interest for the present research is not so much details of historical interpretations of the Belarusian past as generalizations and conclusions, which contain the most valuable reference points of different versions of the Belarusian national idea. One of the main problems in this comparison was the varying availability of educational historical literature covering the “official” and “alternative” histories: while numerous publications exist on official history, publications on alternative common history for a wide readership are rather limited.

The language of political declarations of the national idea alongside its historic grounds has nothing to say concerning the way a certain format of Belarusianness is transformed into a “cultural nation” and becomes a constituent part of a self-description, an element of identity. The space of identity is filled with civil rituals and public cultural manifestations during which an idea acquires symbolic “flesh and blood” and becomes part of the mass social consciousness, invading the territory of self-images and self-representation. Part VI of the book is devoted to a description of the way some image of Belarusianness is manifested in the public and cultural life of Belarusian society. The comparative analysis of public cultural representations was complicated by the fact that, as this research reveals, the two concepts of Belarusianness represent different approaches to nation-definition. A nation as a constructed entity (in the official discourse) and a nation as a cultural unity (the alternative project) imply corresponding different strategies of national identity formation. In the first case, one can speak of a social reification strategy, designed to establish a close correlation between the state and people via the “nation,” and making use of the institutional system, education, various civil rituals, and social practices to build a national construct for Belarus. In the second case, it is rather a wide area of cultural representations through which memories and myths from the past become part of the mass consciousness, penetrating into the space of self-images and self-representations.

As a case study of the cultural manifestation of alternative Belarusian-ness, several examples were chosen. They represent the most significant cultural happenings in the sphere of symbolic representation of the alternative Belarusian idea for the past decade. The examples include: a feature film, *Misterium Occupation*, devoted to a reinterpretation of the events of

World War II; a youth movement of historical reenactments, which represents a network of reenactor groups that recollect and “revive” Belarusian medieval history; the Free Theater, where performances deal with the actual issues of Belarusian present-day reality; and finally independent rock music as a most influential and effective method of political protest and manifestation of the alternative idea of Belarus.

The strategy of public manifestation of official Belarusianness looks different from that of the articulation of alternative Belarusianness. Nevertheless, there are examples of cultural happenings in the context of representing the official national idea: the annual festival “Slavonic Bazaar,” the national historic “blockbuster” film *Anastasia Slutskaiia* (2003), and the stage play by the Belarusian National Theater *Sny ab Belarusi* (Dreams about Belarus). However, as this study aims to prove, they do not carry out the main functions. Official Belarusianness is reified in numerous social practices on the micro and macro levels of everyday life in which the state is involved directly and indirectly.

The intent of this part of the study is to compare the strategies and techniques of public manifestation of official and alternative Belarusianness as a specific tool providing access for them to identity-formative processes in society. Such concepts of Belarusianness influence general political and social processes as the exact basis of a social self-image in Belarusian society.

Various sources are used to estimate the adequacy of official Belarusianness in the perception of Belarusians, that is, to what degree its basic formulations reflect the self-perceptions prevalent in Belarusian society. These include the indirect evidence of results of referenda and elections conducted by the Belarusian authorities (although independent exit poll data, not the official data were taken into consideration), and also the results of independent opinion polls assessing trust in Belarusian authorities and the official course of political and economic development. Another indirect evidence of support for Belarusian authorities in society is confidence in official information sources. The official media in Belarus are a supplement to the authorities and a propaganda device; they serve not only to articulate the ideological message and to present the vision of Belarusian life reflected in the state ideological “mirror” but also to promote the official concept of Belarusianness in general. Yet, as the 2005 IISEPS opinion poll shows, it is state media in which the Belarusian people place their confidence. Answers to the question “Which media do you trust most?” are distributed as follows: of those questioned, 58.2 percent trust the Belarusian state media; 35.2 percent—the Russian media; and 12 percent—the Belarusian independent media. (Other answer options were:

10.2 percent—European and other Western media; and 8 percent—Internet.)⁸ These data affirm the fact that approximately half of Belarusian voters support the Belarusian regime.

The Belarusian national idea and Belarusian nationalism are the subjects of analysis in the works of several Belarusian authors, including S. Dubavets, I. Babkou, and V. Bulgakau. Their central preoccupation is the historical aspect of the Belarusian national idea, its design and its formation as the ideology of the Belarusian national movement at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Many foreign researchers quoted in Part IV view Belarusian identity as a factor in the failure of the democratization of Belarusian society. Books and articles by Jan Zaprudnik, David Marples, Grigory Ioffe, and others investigate Belarusian identity in the context of ongoing sociopolitical processes in independent Belarus. In most of the works mentioned above, Belarusian identity stands in opposition to the state, leaving out those aspects of the Belarusian national idea exploited and promoted by the official discourse of *Belarusianness*. This research provides an alternative interpretation of the Belarusian idea as one that has developed in two different political and cultural contexts and has become the basis of two different national projects.

This work contains a description of the instrumental aspect of the injection of a different content of *Belarusianness* into the social consciousness, an aspect that has not yet been investigated. The comparison of strategies of public manifestation and cultural representations of official and alternative *Belarusianness* provides not only an understanding of the logic of dominating self-description models, but also the ability to evaluate the chances that alternative *Belarusianness* will win this unequal struggle over identity.

The attempt to embrace in one work several dimensions of *Belarusianness*—its political, historical, and cultural representations—is the main objective of this study, which demonstrates the trajectory of the social and cultural reification of the Belarusian nation. However, it also determines the inevitable sketchiness of the work, since each of the problems of articulation and representation in question is in itself a complete topic for separate research. This work can thus be viewed as the starting point for further inquiry into the problem of Belarusian society as a battlefield of two ideas of *Belarusianness*, which can potentially bring forth a more adequate evaluation of events in the country.

8 “Doverie k SMI,” *Arkhiv analitiki IIEPS*, September 2005, www.iieps.org/9-05-12.html.

The name “Belarus” appears in the text in several spellings: during Soviet times, “Byelorussia” was used most often as the name of the Soviet republic, although some authors prefer the spelling “Belorussia” (for example, N. Vakar found it more adequate). After the country became independent, the name “Belarus” was adopted as officially recognized (Беларусь in both Belarusian and Russian). In quotations of different authors the spelling of the name was preserved as used by the authors.

Nation-Formation Strategies in Contemporary Nation-Studies

One of the problems of the studies of Belarusian post-communism transformation scenarios is the fact that the majority of them is based on several “basic truths” which, the longer they are used the more self-evident they become. One of these axiomatic truths of Belarusian post-communism implies lack of Belarusian national identity, which gave a stimulus to the rise of the Belarusian authoritarian regime. One of the obvious indications of this fundamental imperfection of the Belarusian nation is the destiny of political forces of its nationalism: downfall of their popularity in the 1990s, their candidates’ failure in the 1994 presidential elections—the only elections held in accordance with international standards, followed by their ousting to the outskirts of political scene. Even still, the political forces of nationalism are viewed as the sole legitimate carrier—representative and proponent of the Belarusian national idea. The weakness of the Belarusian national self-awareness is considered to be the reason for the defeat of political nationalist forces and for the failure of democratization in the 1990s.

There is a certain logic behind this rhetoric. First, it implies that “the nation” comes out as a reality that exists behind the political scene and predetermines the outcome of the events on it. As the Belarusian political scientist Leonid Zlotnikov once noted, “The Belarusian People Front¹ adheres to the mystical point of view on the nation’s existence. Nationalists consider a nation as some timeless abstract category.”² An appeal of the nationalism’s political force to the national consciousness of Belarusians implies that the nation does exist, albeit in a sleeping, unarticulated state. Second, the Belarusian nationalist forces interpret the nation’s awakening and sometimes reduce it to reorientation of public consciousness from socialist values to liberal and democratic ones. This idea proceeds from the conviction that nationalism, liberalism, and democracy are essentially inter-related. However, the question whether a nation exists prior to national

1 Major representative of the Belarusian political nationalism in present-day Belarus.

2 “Demokratiia i natsionalizm kak *alfa* i *omega* politicheskogo protsessa,” *Adkrytaie gramadstva* no. 2 (11) (2001), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/5.html>.

movements or, on the contrary, nations are “produced” by these movements has no single answer in the theories of nation. The linkage between the nationalism and democratic liberalization is also often considered as questionable. Public discourses of nationalism and liberalism both promote societal cohesion, but they do so by different means and in the names of the different political objectives. The general logic in interrelation of these phenomena lies in the fact that a common awareness of belonging to a national unit seems to be a prerequisite for democratization. Precisely in this sense nationalism had to be conducive to democratization in the socialist countries. In this case nationalism turns out to be one of the attributes and instruments of democratization and liberalization of society. Following this logic, the fact of failed democratization in Belarus seems to serve as an argument that proves the Belarusian identity’s weakness.

Acknowledgement of anti-Belarusian nature of the current Belarusian state derives logically from this assumption. The idea of the Republic of Belarus (governed by A. G. Lukashenka) as an antinational political formation, and an ideology, formulated by the official political discourse as anti-Belarusian is yet another “basic truth” of the Belarusian political opposition, which gained wide following among the Western researchers. The data presented by independent polls is a true paradox to this interpretation of Belarusian reality. It shows that the majority (a little more than a half to be precise) of the society supports the existing regime. This means that alongside the political authorities these Belarusians support, the majority of the people are excluded from the framework of “Belarusian nation,” as defined in oppositional political discourse. Meanwhile, it has to be admitted that Belarusian authorities draw up the project of their legitimacy based on the national idea, postulating it as their project for the Belarusian nation. It is logical to presume that Belarusians, voting in favor of the existing regime, find themselves in the descriptions of Belarusian-ness that are offered by the official discourse.

At the same time, the disposition of political forces where nationalist parties find themselves in hard ideological confrontation with the country’s authorities can be seen as a direct confrontation of the “nation” (as Belarusian nationalists understand it) and the state. Some theorists, however (e.g., E. Gellner, E. Hobsbawm, J. Breuilly) declare that what constitutes the nation is the state.

The answer to the questions about the ontological status of nation, its relation to the nationalist movement and the linkage between nationalism and democratic liberalization lay in the conceptual framework on which the phenomenon of nation and nationalism is placed. It was hardly possi-

ble to review all the existing theories of the national development and nationalism in this book. This chapter examines how theories that are most methodologically charged for analyzing a nation in the contemporary context work when applied to an analysis of emerging and developing of the Belarusian nation.

In the literature on nationalism, one can assume the modernist and the ethnocultural schools of thinking to be the most significant. A special place in the literature on Eastern European nationalism is occupied by Hroch's publications in which he studies the phenomenon of "small" nations' nationalism.³

Fundamental distinction between the modernist and the ethnocultural theories is displayed in their approaches to a number of issues that are a matter of principle in comprehension of the nation. Above all, it is a formulation of a kind of "nation ontology"—whether a nation is an existing objective phenomenon or it belongs to the "imagined," invented, constructed world. Representatives of the modernist school, under whose umbrella a number of significant theories of nation have been developed, emphasize the conscious construction of a nation, the function of nationalism as a political interest group and the subjectivity of national characteristics. For all major representatives of this school—Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm—it is characteristic to refuse to treat a nation and nationalism as something objectively given; for them, the nation is not only recent, it is novel, and is a product of the process of modernization.

Within the ethnocultural school, represented by Anthony Smith, a nation is defined through objective characteristics that express ethnocultural identity. "Nation is a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties of all members."⁴ "Nation" and "national," in Smith's concept, have a special authentic status; that is why "nationalism signifies the awakening of the nation and its members to its true collective 'self,' so that it, and they, obey only the 'inner voice' of the

3 "Small" nations are the nations that do not have a tradition of political independence and "were dominated by a ruling class of more or less alien nationality," and they "were in subjection to a ruling nation for such a long period that the relation of subjection took on a structural character for both parties." Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8–9.

4 Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 49.

purified community.”⁵ At the same time A. Smith’s nationalism deals with the material of cultural identities and cultural nations, it is “a *form of culture*—an ideology, a language, a mythology, symbolism and consciousness—that has achieved global resonance and the nation is a type of identity whose meaning and priority is presupposed by this form of culture.”⁶

Smith realizes that one of the latent contradictions of his theory is the fact that the major symbolic and cultural elements of an ethnocultural approach (and its nation as a phenomenon of objective reality) belong to a subjective order, as they focus on the perceptions, memories, beliefs, and values of individuals and communities. He overcomes this contradiction explaining that the long-term patterning of these elements “produces a structure of relations and processes that is independent of those beliefs and perceptions, one which can provide a framework for the socialization of successive generations of ethnic and national members.”⁷ Nationalism, according to Smith, carries its power from the “real feelings” of peoples “rooted,” not least through “territorializing” forces of nationalism, in the social landscape of the modern world and its values. The idea of cultural nature of the nation was also developed by a Polish sociologist Antonina Kłoskowska. The language, political system, and practices of day-to-dayness are basic forms of a definite idea of nation manifestation. However, according to Kłoskowska, it is culture that predetermines an existence of the nation and the functioning of the symbolic culture is dependent on individual. Cultural symbols can only be actually realized in the relation of subject of cultures to them. Thus, in Kłoskowska’s view, “the issue of the nation in the historical perspective should be related to the consciousness of the people who experienced national culture in real life.”⁸ Hroch, on the contrary, defines the nation as an element of “real” order. In his book on social preconditions for nation-building he stresses the objective character of his concept of a nation. “In contrast with the subjectivist conception of the nation as the product of nationalism, the national will and spiritual forces, we posit the conception of the nation as a constituent of social reality of historical origin. We consider the origin of the modern nation as the fundamental reality and nationalism as a phenomenon derived from the existence of that nation.”⁹ For Hroch an existing nation is a natural com-

5 Smith, *National Identity*, 77.

6 Smith, *National Identity*, 91–92.

7 Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

8 Antonina Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni* (Warsaw: PWN, 1996), 74.

9 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 3.

munity, joined with a relevant state of the collective mind: “national consciousness and objective relations between the members of a nation form an indivisible unity [...] There is no modern nation without national consciousness, i.e. an awareness of membership in the nation, coupled with a view that this membership is an inherently valuable quality.”¹⁰ For all its political nature, nationalism’s task is to awaken the national consciousness and to implement in the political practice the natural aspirations of a nation to be shaped into a state. In this aspect Hroch’s interpretation of nationalism as a political ideology almost approaches the modernists’ point of view, according to which nationalism is a political instrument whereby national bourgeoisie “converts” wide popular masses.

In this way, both M. Hroch and A. Smith ontologically define the nation in terms of objective reality, thus opposing their concept to that of modernist’s nation as consciously constructed. At the same time, the instrumental part of the definition of nationalism as a political ideology in Hroch’s interpretation to a great extent coincides with how Hobsbawm and other modernists see it—nationalism is a political ideology aimed at awakening wide masses.

Hroch describes the three fundamental phases of the national movement: Phase A (the period of scholarly interest), Phase B (the period of patriotic agitation), and Phase C (the rise of a mass national movement).¹¹ Symbolic culture is the order in which Smith’s nationalism finds its place; however, in Hroch’s scheme it is present just at the first stage of nationalism development, at the time when learned researchers of Phase A “discover” the ethnic group and lay the basis of a “national identity.” A modern nation-building process starts with the collection of information about the history, language, and customs of the non-dominant ethnic group, which later becomes the important element in patriotic agitation. This intellectual activity and its subject-matter—elements of symbolic culture and history—also have instrumental meaning for Hroch in the political process of nation-building. At the same time, he posits a nation’s existence as independent of the nationalist movement, and in this sense a nation-building process is a process of national awakening seen as an indication of the national interest that had existed before and outside nationalism: “national ideology is effective where it reflects (even though in a merely illusory fashion) the interests of the groups to which it makes its appeal, or contains at least in part the kind of programme which is close to their in-

10 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 12.

11 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 23.

terests.”¹² With this definition of the nation as existing and expressing itself through national striving instead of being engendered by it and being its creation, Hroch again opposes modernism. For Gellner, however, as well as for Hobsbawm, “nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent [...] political destiny, are myths; nationalism, which sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality.”¹³

Another line of divergence between theories of nation is the status of the past in the nation's present. Modernists negate any connection and continuity between a modern nation and its pre-modern tradition, the nations for them are modern phenomena and the product of nationalist ideologies, which themselves are expression of modern, industrial society. In this perspective, nations are embedded in purely modern conditions. Although nationalists are free to use the past and elements of symbolic culture for the ideological purposes, they are not restricted by any “reality of the past.” At the same time, ideas developed by ethnosymbolists or historic culturalists—such as A. D. Smith, J. Hutchinson¹⁴ and W. Connor¹⁵—effectively convince that the nation cannot afford to get rid of its past and neglect its origins. From this point of view, modern nationhood, even with its alleged “break with the past” (which means introducing and allowing standardization to face the demands of modernity), also confronts the need of rescuing or rediscovering cultural originality. Moreover, as Anthony Smith writes, it is the sense of common past and a shaped destiny that serves as the ideological motor driving the modern state forward. A central theme of historical ethno-symbolism, in Smith's view, is “the relationship of shared memories to collective cultural identities: memory, almost by definition, is integral to cultural identity, and the cultivation of shared memories is essential to the survival and destiny of such collective identities.”¹⁶ In this respect, Hroch again is closer to Smith's ideas, as he inscribes the past and the memory into the definition of a nation. According to him, a nation is integrated by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness. The first of them is “a ‘memory’ of some common past, treated as a ‘destiny’

12 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 12.

13 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 48–49.

14 John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

15 Walker Connor, “Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?” *World Politics* 24 (1972): 319–55.

16 Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 10.

of the group—or at least of its core constituent.”¹⁷ Two others are “the density of linguistic or cultural ties enabling a high degree of social communication and a conception of the equality of all members of the group organized as a civil society.”¹⁸

Social communication, according to Hroch, is especially meaningful in the process of political nation-building, in his observation “the national movement was taken up most enthusiastically on the part of the territory of a small nation which displayed the highest relative level of social communication.”¹⁹ In this case the level of development and intensity of the social communication in society is connected with the transition to capitalism, as Hroch claims, the main instrument of the communication process “were the market relationships which developed out of a small scale commodity production, and only secondarily the development of the educational system.”²⁰

Following this logic of strict correlation between the national development and the capitalist transition Hroch specifies several individual types of the national development in dependence of the phase of the industrial and historical development of society at the moment when “national awakening” takes place. These are “integrated,” “delayed,” “early,” and “disintegrated” types of national development.

In an integrated state the industrial revolution starts before the bourgeois revolution and occurs at a time when national agitation is already taking place. The national movement attains a mass character during or shortly after the revolution.

What was characteristic for this type was that the newly formed modern nation relatively quickly gained a complete class structure and worked out its national programme in the course of the revolution. In a delayed state of the national development, national agitation emerged before the political revolution and the industrial revolution, but the transition to Phase C, the mass national movement, was delayed, so it first took place when the class-conscious proletariat was already organized, or even after the coming of the working-class movement. The formation of the modern nation

17 Miroslav Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe” in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. G. Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 79.

18 Hroch, “From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation,” 79.

19 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 174; Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication. An Enquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge: MA, 1953).

20 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 174.

therefore took place belatedly [...] Whether this phase-shift was caused by uneven economic development on the territory [...] patriotic agitation in these cases became intimately involved in the crystallized class contradictions of capitalist society.²¹ To illustrate this type of national development Hroch gives the example of Latvia and Slovakia, but Belarus also fits this category.²² In an early state the nation is formed before the bourgeois revolution, and this process could well be completed even before the industrial revolution. Finally, in a disintegrated state national agitation begins after the bourgeois revolution and the coming of industrial revolution; as a result national movements of this type enter the mass phase very late or not at all.²³

According to Hroch, a nation is an attribute of building capitalism, and this is characteristic not only for the nation-building process of the nineteenth century, but also for the developments in late twentieth-century Eastern Europe. As Gellner writes, the basic logic of Hroch's approach "is to relate nationalism to a single and stark transition, namely, that from pre-industrial to capitalist society."²⁴ At the same time, Gellner notes lack of interest in Hroch's works to the implication for nationalism of the transition from capitalist to socialism. Gellner admits that Hroch's standpoint is congruent with his own idea that nationalism is directly connected with industrialization.

In Gellner's theory a nation is interpreted as a peculiar necessity for structurization and standardization of society which had historically emerged in the epoch of industrial society: "Industrial society [...] could hardly be organized on any base other than national one."²⁵ Industrial society requires standardization, because at this precisely historical stage "the formal rules of operation of the society, at work and in politics, both permit and, above all, require members of the society to have the same culture."²⁶ In Gellner's interpretation the concept of nation can exist only in

21 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 28.

22 The analysis of the Belarusian national development in the context of Hroch's theory: Yaroslav Shimov, "Belorussia: Vostochnoevropeiskii paradoks," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* no. 3 (47) (2006), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2006/47/sh11.html>. Main conclusion he makes is that development of the Belarusian nation compared to other nations in the Eastern Europe looks as somewhat slowed.

23 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 27–30.

24 Ernest Gellner, "The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class," in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. G. Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 135.

25 Gellner, "The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation," 111.

26 Gellner, "The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation," 109.

the context of the state, and it has a cultural nature. The logic of a nation's emergence is described by Gellner as an expansion of high culture triggered by the objective course of the industrial revolution. The new epoch brought about transformation in the nature of labor, "work has become semantic, and work requires impersonal context-free communication between individuals, members of broad mass. This can only be done if the members of that broad mass share the same rules for formulating and decoding messages. In other words, they must share the same culture. And it will be a high culture, for this standardized skill can only be acquired in formal schooling."²⁷ That is why an especially important role in nation formation is assigned to the state, because only the state "can perform the task of quality control in this most important of all industries, that is the production of socially acceptable, industrially operational human beings."²⁸

Nation-states Gellner defines as political units systematically and proudly differentiated from each other by culture. "Given the competition of various states for overlapping catchment areas, the only way a given culture can protect itself against another one, which already has its particular protector-state, is to acquire one of its own, if it does not already possess one."²⁹ In this context nationalism means "a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent,"³⁰ a basic thesis for many proponents of the modernist school of nation-state. Thus, a nation is defined as a product of nationalism expressed in a cultural form and inculcated in the industrial development of society. According to Gellner, nation-building means not so much awakening of the nation to self-consciousness, but the invention of it. Dependent on the particulars of the political tradition, this process takes place with a greater or lesser degree of national propagandists' participation. Nation-building inevitably results in creation of a homogeneous standardized national culture that coincides with the borders of state and is created with its direct participation.

Eric Hobsbawm also sees nations as dynamic constructs of historical capitalism. A few assumptions are critical for his concept of the nation: following Gellner, he defines "nationalism" as a principle that holds that political and national unit should be matching; therefore, a "nation" is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of a modern national state, the "nation-state." According to Hobsbawm, nations and their associated

27 Gellner, "The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation," 107.

28 Gellner, "The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation," 109–10.

29 Gellner, "The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation," 110.

30 Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

phenomena must be analyzed in terms of political, technical, administrative, economic, and other conditions and requirements.³¹ Also, like Gellner, Hobsbawm stresses the element of artifactual invention and social engineering that enters into the making of the nation, but he also considers nations as “dual phenomena constructed essentially from the above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below [...] in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people.”³²

In the historical perspective of nationalism-making Hobsbawm distinguishes two stages, with their own types of nationalism: an earlier nineteenth-century mass civic-political and a late-nineteenth-century divisive ethnolinguistic nationalism. The rise of a state-creating modern nationalism, he suggests, was principally a product of the need of capitalist elites to control the recently mobilized and enfranchised masses through the use of national invented traditions. The great proponents of nation-building in Europe were “the lower and middle professional, administrative and intellectual strata, in other words, the educated strata.”³³

The decisive importance of the institutions and culture of the ruling classes or the educated elites for Hobsbawm was the criterion of what he terms “historic” nationhood.³⁴ The basis of this sense of nationhood was economic and political, and not necessarily “ethnic.” He goes on to imply that small nations (he uses the example of the Irish nation), were “unhistorical” or “semi-historical.” This position makes Hobsbawm one of the strongest advocates of “big-nation” nationalism, who, “like other champions of the ‘big-nation,’ assumed that the nation must not be only national—it must also be ‘progressive’.”³⁵ Indeed, in Hobsbawm’s view, nation-building in the nineteenth century was a prerogative of major capitalist states. The fate of small nations was to live the consequences of big nation making, and even more, they “had everything to gain by merging into greater nations, and making their contributions to humanity through this.”³⁶ In this case their own requirements were considered as regressive and irrational, being against “the law of progress.” The requirement of the right of self-determination pronounced by small nations could be assessed

31 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 9–10.

32 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 10.

33 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848* (New York : Mentor, 1962), 170.

34 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875* (London: Cardinal, 1988), 107.

35 Jim Mac Laughlin, *Reimagining the Nation-State. The Contested Terrains of Nation-Buildings* (London: Pluto, 2001), 112.

36 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 34.

as attempts of Western Europe “Balkanization” before major state-nations are able to manifest their possibilities of modernization.³⁷ At the same time, according to Hobsbawm, building of big and progressive nation-states in no way was an aim in itself: “such nations were the building blocks of world capitalism during a lengthy period of its development, and with it of bourgeois society in the ‘developed’ world [...] They represented that crucial element—the creation of internal conditions (e.g. ‘a national market’) and the external conditions for the development of the ‘national economy’ through state organization and action. The case for such nation-state was not nationalist in the current sense, inasmuch as it did not envisage a world of nation-states irrespective of size and resources, but only one viable state of medium to a large size.”³⁸

Thus, Hobsbawm gives a clear impression of being opposed to separatist nationalism per se. He sees ideological significance of nationalism in small nations, which did not have a powerful national industrial middle class or well-organized industrial proletariat, as expressed in the progress of church-building, in the spread of elementary education, in the success of the provincial press, and in the improvements in any means of communication that could bring ordinary people out of their parochial worlds and lead them on to the “institutional” or “procedural landscape” of the modern nation-state.³⁹ In his later texts Hobsbawm describes the period between 1880 and 1918 as a new phase of modern nationalism. There are a few particularities that distinguish this new nationalism from the “historical nation-building.” Here no longer works the “threshold” principle—when in the new conditions a body of people, provided they consider themselves a nation, could now claim the right of self-determination. Besides, language, ethnicity, or religion now became the decisive criteria of potential nationhood.

The next period, between 1918 and 1950, Hobsbawm describes as the apogee of nationalism, because it was dominated by the nationalism of established nation-states. This period saw essential changes in the technology of formation and expression of the national identity related to the rise of new mass-media—the press, cinema, and the radio. New technologies and means of communication brought about new possibilities in bridging the

37 Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (New Delhi: Rupia Publications, 1992), 73.

38 Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Some Reflections on the Break-up of Britain,” *New Left Review* 105 (1977): 4.

39 Mac Laughlin, *Reimagining the Nation-State*, 103–4.

gap between the private and the public worlds, or, as he writes, in making “what were in effect national symbols, part of the life of every individual.”⁴⁰

The education system, electronic mass media, and civil rituals, in Hobsbawm’s concept, played a crucial role in translation of the political ideology of nationalism to the level of individual perception and receptivity. Hobsbawm, like Gellner, attributed a critical role in the national identity formation to the state; nationalism for him is a dual phenomenon—a political ideology and a subjective conviction. At the same time, an individual for him is not just some raw material in the production of the subjects of the nation, but also an independent agent of nation-building that possesses his own private territory and is able to react to the national propaganda in various ways.

The subjective nature of the concept of the nation is even stronger expressed in the theory of Benedict Anderson. According to Anderson, the nation is ‘an imagined political community’ which developed in the aftermath of the French revolution and during the course of the industrial and commercial revolutions. “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation can never hope to meet all their fellow members. Nevertheless, in the mind of each citizen there resides an image of the national community tied together, usually by a common history, a shared geography or national territory, a common culture, common religion and common language.”⁴¹ Thus, according to Anderson, nations were historical and geographical creations whose imagining was conditioned by the historical and geographical circumstances in which they developed.

At the same time, nations as imagined communities, each with its own style of life and thinking, were also building blocks of modernity and territorial expressions of national capitalism. It is no accident that the beginning of the nationalism’s development is related to Western Europe. It coincided with the emergence of the national bourgeoisie in these countries. Nations “happen” when and where people-as-creators of the nation can imagine themselves as a part of the nation, and as a part of national collectivity. It is the bourgeoisie who “invited” the masses into history. Anderson, like many other students of nationalism, stresses the role of nationalists who are responsible for the way and style of imagining nation. Indeed, acknowledgement of the bourgeoisie’s role as the main force of nationalism became a sort of cross-theory truth. For B. Anderson—as for E. Hobsbawm, A. Smith, and others—the progress of nationalism was inti-

40 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 142.

41 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 6–7. Cited in Mac Laughlin, *Reimagining the Nation-State*, 97.

mately bound up with the emergence of secularized middle-class intelligentsia.

A special meaning is given by Anderson to the merger of capitalism with the print technology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which gave birth to print capitalism both as an industry and as a mass medium. It created a possibility of a new form of imagined community that was completely different from the great global communities of the past. "The old everyday certainties of pre-modern life—belief in an afterlife, acceptance of loss of freedom, belief in the rights of monarchies and landed elites—became meaningless. The new thought was spread chiefly through the secular channels of newspapers and other products of print capitalism. These in turn made possible a new form of 'imagined community,' the nation."⁴² Unlike other modernists, Anderson sees nationalism not as a political ideology comparable to other ideologies, but rather, as an integrative belief system.

Anderson also emphasizes the language issue. For Hobsbawm, for instance, linguistic nationalism has an applied, and in essence a political meaning. "At all events problems of power, status, politics and ideology and not of communication or even culture, lie at the heart of the nationalism of language,"⁴³ Hobsbawm writes in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. For Anderson the language plays a more meaningful role. It is an expression of a particular closeness of national relations, it is both intimate and natural. And despite its intimacy, it identifies a form of collective membership that can be acquired. "What limits one's access to other languages is not their imperviousness but one's own mortality [...] Seen as both a historical fatality and as a community imagined through language, the nation presents itself as simultaneously open and closed."⁴⁴ Our existence, in Anderson's opinion, is largely determined by the language, and that is why print capitalism had a decisive meaning in the determination of a social being in the modern world. "Print-language is what invents nationalism, not a particular language per se."⁴⁵ Print-languages were national and they mapped out the terrain upon which the modern nation-state was constructed. They

42 Mac Laughlin, *Reimagining the Nation-State*, 99.

43 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 110.

44 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 134.

45 In this context it is worthwhile to mention the concept of Antonina Kłosowska who wrote that, though the language is undoubtedly a very important element of nationness, "one cannot reduce participation in the nation to the direct communication and content transferred through it. The participation requires presence of imagined meanings and active semiotic factors" Kłosowska, "Kultury narodowe u korzeni," 108.

served to the unification of disunited societies, creating homogeneous territories, at least vernacularly.

Similarly to Gellner and Hobsbawm, Anderson assigned a special role in nation formation to the state. The state certainly has been directly and indirectly responsible for fostering whole new styles of “imagining,” which in turn have helped construct “imagined communities” of nations all across Asia and Africa. This is because the modern state has not merely aspired “to create, under its control, a human landscape of perfect visibility.”⁴⁶ The modern state fostered new ways of becoming “visible;” it gave everyone and everything within the state’s domain a label, a serial number, a place or a name, and it thereby made everyone, and everything, highly visible in the procedural landscape of the modern nation-state. These styles of “imagining” were products of the new system for monitoring and itemizing people in the procedural or “programmed” landscapes of the modern nation-state and its territorial possessions.

Viewed in this context, the modern “imagined community” of the nation was not just a cultural construct, as Jim Mac Laughlin writes; it was a scientific construct because it became a product of census collection, cartography, land surveying, and the relentless driving force of modern—and increasingly national—capitalism. Anderson describes the essence and role of these processes in the context of nation-building using examples from post-colonial countries in the Third World from the 1950s on. But the meaning of Anderson’s theory exceeds the boundaries of the time and region. Similar processes could be observed in other countries and in different times: mapping the nation and collecting data on its population size and distribution were not just exercises in cartography and demography. They made visible the basic outline of the nation as a territory and as a social formation. “Cartography and the collection of statistics [...] equipped nation-builders with the means whereby they could ‘imagine’ and literally ‘visualise’ the modern [...] nation for the first time.”⁴⁷ The meaning of Anderson’s concept is not only in its definition of the nation as imagined community, it also enables us to reconsider the sense of the articulation of the national identity. Thus, Anderson demonstrates that imaginative power of nation-building agents was exerted at different levels. It was promoted and maintained through the labor and discursive practice of a whole range of players, institutions, and social groups, including the press and the political establishment.

⁴⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 184–5.

⁴⁷ Mac Laughlin, *Reimagining the Nation-State*, 228.

State and Nation

The issue of the relations between the state and the nation is one of the most significant ones in the nation definition. According to Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson, a “state” is practically a synonym of the nation and simultaneously the main objective and aspiration of the nationalists; the state is the basis of a nation and an instrument for its promoting and creating. As David McCrone noted, “So successfully have these two ideas (the ‘nation’ and the ‘state’) been grafted on to each other, that our vocabulary struggles to distinguish between them.”¹ John Breuilly says that nationalism as a political force is an exclusively modern, and a firmly political argument and movement, which became a spurious solution to the alienation brought on by the split between the absolutist state and civil society.² Anthony Giddens defines the nation as a “bordered power-container.” According to Giddens, a nation “only exists when a state has a unified administrative reach over the territory over which its sovereignty is claimed,”³ and a “nation-state” is “a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining and administering monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence.”⁴ It was not by accident that Smith characterizes the theories of Breuilly and Giddens as “narrowly defined, state-centered modernism [...] which suffers from excessive emphasis on the role of political institutions, and is too dismissive of the legacies of pre-modern ethnic and cultural ties.”⁵ In Smith’s definition, a nation is inscribed into the cultural-historical context and may or may not have its own homeland or state.⁶ This is where nationalism differs from

1 David McCrone, *Sociology of Nationalism. Tomorrow’s Ancestors* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 7.

2 John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983). Cited in Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 7.

3 Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (London: Routledge, 1985), 119.

4 Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 121.

5 Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 7.

6 Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 102.

patriotism, which is directly connected with the state, because it is, as Smith defines it, "a sense of attachment to a country or state."⁷ The reality in which the national unity is formed, refers to the level of symbolic culture, and in this sense the importance of the state is subsidiary and in no way predetermines the nation.

The state's role in the nation formation has become a basis for distinction between the two types of nationalism, described by H. Kohn.⁸ He wrote about the Western and the Eastern types of nationalism. In Kohn's description, the Western type of nationalism—which applied to such countries as England, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland—was largely political and territorial, the nation coincided with the political territory governed by the state, and people were defined as citizens. The Eastern type of nationalism applies to Central and Eastern Europe and Asia, where the frontiers of the existing states and ethnic communities rarely coincided. An "Eastern" version of nationalism is organic and mystical, the nation here is seen as a seamless, organic unity with a mystical "soul" and "mission." People here were defined as "the folk." In the case of Western nationalism, the ideology of nationalism was largely a product of the middle classes who came to power in these states at the end of the eighteenth century. On the contrary, in the case of Eastern nationalism, there was no developed significant middle class, therefore a few intellectuals took a role of the major actors in nationalist movements. This typology underlies the distinction between the "civic" and the "ethnic" nationalism, which became a working typology of nationalism in the works of many authors.⁹

Civic nationalism defines nationhood in terms of citizenship and political participation. It can only exist within the context of a territorial state; it is the bond formed through the enterprise of statehood. The ethnic nationalism defines nationhood in terms of lineage. The attributes that members of an ethnically defined national grouping share include physical characteristics, culture, language, religion, and common ancestry. In Smith's opinion, the distinction between the rational and the mystical (organic) types of nationalism is actually useful, though the idea of a precise division

7 Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 102.

8 Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism. A Study in Its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

9 L. Greenfield, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell 1986); Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992).

between them on a territorial base is rather arguable.¹⁰ The Eastern European nationalism does differ from its Western counterpart by nature of its higher degree of mixed settlement, and its lack of a perceived continuous political history. However, “there is not enough difference to speak of a particular Eastern European type of nationalism, which is profoundly different from the development in Western Europe.”¹¹ This becomes especially obvious if we turn to the political practice of the late twentieth century, when the difference between the East European and West European versions of nation-building does not look so clear. Though ethnolinguistic sentiments have been re-emphasized in the West, territorially defined statehood became an alternative criterion for national identity in the East.¹² This was particularly manifested after the disintegration of the Communist Bloc; only Baltic states, and—to a certain extent—the Balkan states, have chosen to base their citizenship mainly on ethnic criteria, while Russia, the Ukraine, and Belarus preferred a civil, territorial concept of citizenship.¹³ This means that the classical distinction between these two types of nationalism as principally Western and Eastern is, to a large extent, a matter of history and of genealogy of the nation. Meanwhile the topic of relations between the nation and the state has had a further development.

On the one hand, “the nation as a representative of the people has become in the twentieth century the principal form of legitimation of the state.”¹⁴ On the other hand, the question what makes a nation a nation is still topical. As Etienne Balibar formulates it, the fundamental problem is “to produce a people. More exactly, it is to make the people *produce itself* continually as a national community. Or again, it is to produce the effect of unity by virtue of which the people will appear, in everyone’s eyes, ‘as a people,’ that is, as the basis and origin of political power.”¹⁵ In the overwhelming majority of theories, such a level of authority that bears the brunt

10 Smith, *National Identity*, 81.

11 Thomas Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State* (Vienna: Wiener Universitätverlag, 1999), 73.

12 Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State*, 48.

13 Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot, *Russia and the New States of Eurasia: The Politics of Upheaval* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 60–79.

14 Michael D. Kennedy and Ronald G. Suny, “Introduction” in *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation*, ed. R. G. Suny and M. D. Kennedy (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 1.

15 Etienne Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology” in *Becoming National*, ed. G. Eley and R. G. Suny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 138.

of the production of the nation is the state, or to use Balibar's term—a "nationalizing state." In this scenario the state and the nation find themselves enclosed in a circle of interdependence. The nation is a source of legitimation of the state; simultaneously it is the state that makes the nation produce itself as a national community. To break out of this vicious circle is possible only through "practice," as "a social formation only reproduces itself as a nation to the extent that through a network of apparatuses and daily practices, the individual is instituted as *homo nationalis* from cradle to grave."¹⁶

Special attention should be given to Brubaker's ideas who in "Nationalism Reframed" (1996) writes about the role of the state and of the political institutions in nation formation, not in terms of its instrumental character and/or the function of historical unification, but in terms of it constituting a form of the nation's reification. He rephrases the issue of a nation definition, "We should not ask 'what is the nation?,' but, rather: how is nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalized within and among states. How does the nation work as practical category, as a classificatory scheme, as a cognitive frame?"¹⁷ In fact, he in equal measure disagrees with ethnosymbolists and modernists by proposing an alternative way of nation conceptualization, which consists of decoupling the study of nationhood and nationness from the study of nations as substantial entities, collectivities, and communities. In Brubaker's opinion the objectivist ethnocultural theory of the nation that makes use of such objective characteristics as language, territory, religion, as well as the modernist and constructivist concepts that see the nation as something formed in the process of industrialization, increased communication all have the power of "substantialist approach."¹⁸ He proposes an interpretation of the nation as bound up with social praxis. "Nation is a category of 'practice,' not (in the first instance) a category of analysis. To understand nationalism, we have to understand the practical uses of the category of nation, the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political action."¹⁹ Understood in this manner, the nation is a result of "institutionalization." From this perspective, nations result from the numerous social practices, fabricated with the help of elec-

16 Etienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology," 137–38.

17 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the Nationalism Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.

18 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 14.

19 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 10.

tronic media, printed press, schools, popular culture, and so on. Brubaker, on the contrary, writes about “institutionalization as a symbolic reification as a means of nation implementation as a reality. Reification in his understanding is a “social process, not only an intellectual one.”²⁰ It is central to the phenomenon of nationalism, namely through the process of social reification, that “the political fiction of the nation becomes momentarily yet powerfully realized in practice.”²¹ Brubaker develops the idea of symbolic reification of P. Bourdieu, although the latter wrote not about the nation, but about group-making reification in general. This symbolic dimension is central to the quasi-performative discourse of nationalist politicians who, at certain moments, can succeed in creating what it seems to presuppose—namely, the existence of nation as mobilized or mobilizing groups. Bourdieu describes struggle for ethnic or regional identity as a “struggle over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, to make and unmake groups.”²² Social institutions are the level of authority in whose power there is a possibility of “knowledge installation” and means of self-perception, an authority in identity formation.

The approach to nationalism studies proposed by Brubaker fits the framework of “new institutionalism.” New institutionalism differs from the older sociological institutionalism by emphasizing not just the compulsive character of institutions, but the institutional constitution of both interests and actors.²³ In other words, emphasis is given to the fact how a certain perception, including self-perception, appears under the impact of institutions, and how identity is formed in the process of institutional reification.

20 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 15.

21 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 16.

22 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 221.

23 Paul DiMaggio and Walter L. Powell, “Introduction,” in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, ed. W. Powell and P. DiMaggio (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2–15. George M. Thomas et al., *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society and the Individual* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987).

*Nationalism, Capitalism, Liberalism:
The East European Perspective*

The approach proposed by Brubaker enables to see the events of a new wave of nation-building in Eastern Europe in a different light. The national revival we observe in this region, Brubaker writes, “is not engendered by nations [...] It is produced—or better, it is induced—by political fields of particular kinds [...] And its dynamics are governed by the properties of political fields, not by the properties of collectivities.”¹ In a similar manner, albeit from a different theoretical standpoint, Hobsbawm estimates the East European explosion of nationalism. He believes that the changes that took place during and after 1989 were essentially not the result of national tension but, rather, the result of the Soviet regime’s decision to reform itself. According to Hobsbawm, “nationalism was the beneficiary of these developments but not, in any serious sense, an important factor in bringing them about [...] The growing deterioration of living conditions for ordinary citizens, the undermined faith in the all-Union government, made responsible for it and indeed encouraged or even imposed regional and local solutions to problem.”² The national disintegration of the USSR and the events in post-socialist countries became the consequence of events in Moscow rather than their cause.³

The developments related to the East European national revival in the late twentieth century have become a source of various contradictory interpretations. On the one hand, this issue is closely interlaced with the perception of the primary connection of nationalism with the capitalist formation (industrialization, modernization), as well as the connection of nationalism and democracy (as Hroch depicts it). On the other hand, it is linked with the issue of ideological contradictions between socialism and nationalism implanted in their competition for the primacy of the definition of an individual identity through the relation to a class or a nation. The discussion of the new wave of national revival against the background of

1 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 17.

2 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 168.

3 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 167–68.

“the end of socialism” revealed its debatable character or, at least, a prematurity of conclusions about “the *decline* of nationalism as a vector of historical change.”⁴

* * *

The resurgence of nationalist sentiment in Eastern Europe since 1990 and the effect of this resurgence on the European political landscape is addressed in a number of works.⁵ For many authors transformations on the geopolitical map of Europe at the end of the twentieth century brought on by the disintegration of the USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, have become a new stage of national liberation. Hroch states that in Eastern Europe we face “new national movements” whose goals “offer many analogies with those of the nineteenth century, as well as some significant differences.”⁶ Such a repetitive national issue is a linguistic and ethnic demand. In the 1990s, like in 1920s, linguistic and cultural appeals act as “substitutes for articulated political demands.”⁷ Remarkably, one of the driving ideas of the national revival in post-communist countries, according to Hroch, is “building” capitalism. “The leaders of nationalist movements aim for a very specific goal: to complete the social structure of the nation by creating a capitalist class corresponding to that of Western states.”⁸ This statement confirms his strong commitment to the idea of capitalist society as an ideal “framework” for national development. Furthermore, it implies that the socialist system is at variance with such a development.

4 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 163. However, in Hobsbawm’s opinion, the developments in Eastern Europe do not disaffirm this thesis because “the explosive issues of 1988–92 were those created in 1918–21 and in equal measure they can serve as a final stage of the solution of old national questions” (164). Gellner writes that the national development was suspended in the conditions of socialism, and at the moment of the systems’ breakup these societies “resumed the development which had been frozen seventy (or, in some areas, forty) years earlier. Ernest Gellner, “The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class,” in *Mapping the Nation*, 131.

5 “Reconstructing Nations and States,” *Daedalus* 122 (Summer 1993); Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); William Pfaff, *The Wrath of Nations: Civilization and the Furies of Belonging: Journey into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994); Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (New York: Penguin, 1994). Charles A. Kupchan, ed., *Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

6 Hroch, *From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation*, 89.

7 Hroch, *From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation*, 92.

8 Hroch, *From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation*, 90.

Thomas Winderl named this period “a third wave of nation-state building,”⁹ thus paraphrasing Samuel Huntington’s concept of a “third wave of democratization.”¹⁰ Foremost this refers to the states that have arisen on the political map of Europe. “Never before in the course of history has so much states building gone on in such a short period of time.”¹¹ At the same time, nationalism has replaced communism not only in the countries that aspired to redesign their boundaries, but also in the states that remained within their old political framework. Some scholars consider nationalism to be a part of the symbolic capital that has become the basis for the processes of society’s systemic transformation. Thus, Leslie Holmes defines post-communism as a product of the double-rejective revolutions, which consisted of the rejection of the external domination and of the totalitarian political regime.¹² In this sense, nationalism had the appearance of liberation struggle triggered by the dependence on another state and was one of the driving forces of the anti-communist movement that facilitated the collapse of the old system.

A number of authors view the appeal of nationalism as a consequence of the ideological vacuum that has appeared with the destruction of the socialist system. Hall writes that nationalism provides a framework for new identities, which become needed with the loss of old references.¹³ Renata Salecl in her work devoted to the national identity in post-communist Slovenia writes that nationalism was claimed as a mechanism of alienation from the old ideological system of values. “The present outburst of nationalism in Eastern European socialist countries is a reaction to the fact that long years of (Communist) Party rule by destroying the traditional fabric of society, have dismantled most traditional points of social identification so that when people now attempt to distance themselves from the official ideological universe, the only positive reference point at their disposal is national identity.”¹⁴ Hroch writes about it in a similar fashion. In his opinion, nationalism enabled the peoples of Eastern Europe to manage the social disorientation that had arisen at the moment of the old system’s col-

9 Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State*, 49.

10 Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

11 Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State*, 48.

12 Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 14–15.

13 J. Hall, “After the Vacuum: Post-Communism the Light of Tocqueville,” in *Markets, States and Democracy*, ed. B. Crawford (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 86–88.

14 Renata Salecl, “National Identity and Socialist Moral Majority,” in *Becoming National*, ed. G. Eley and R. G. Suny (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 418.

lapse. "The basic pre-condition of all national movements—yesterday and today—is a deep crisis of the old order, with the breakdown of its legitimacy, and of the values and sentiments that sustained it."¹⁵ According to this perspective, nationalism has a certain therapeutic function and its outburst is connected to the demand for a new basis for shaping collective self-consciousness at the approach to a new democratic system. Such basis has led to a merger of democratization and nationalism in the perception of the transition processes in Eastern Europe.

Another reason for this alliance has become the ideological unity of democracy and nationalism in the historical perspective. The modern national state, like democracy, is based on the idea of equality and sovereignty of all citizens irrespective of the social status. Greenfield sees such arrangement as something primordial: "Democracy was born with the sense of nationality. [...] Nationalism was the form in which democracy appeared in the world. [...] Originally, nationalism developed democracy."¹⁶ Frederick Hertz also underlines the meaning of the idea of equality within the framework of the nation, which comprises the basis of the national ideology. "An important factor in nationality is also the striving for a certain level of equality within nation. Equality is indispensable for unity and liberty and is implied in these aims. There cannot be any real unity and solidarity between masters and slaves, a highly privileged class and downtrodden serfs."¹⁷ As Ghia Nodia writes, "nationalism is a melting pot of democratic (meaning: self-determining) political communities."¹⁸

Apart from the ideological bond, there is a functional connection between nationalism and democracy: a national state is the "locus" of democracy. Democratic politics were generally seen as an expression of interplay between forces operating within the nation-state.¹⁹ Smith emphasizes the importance of the available "national substrate" for democracy building, as "states, without ethnic cores will tend to resort to authoritarian regimes to mask the disunity consequent of the absence of ethnic identity and history."²⁰

15 Hroch, *From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation*, 96.

16 Greenfield, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity*, 10.

17 Frederick Hertz, *Nationality in History and Politics. A Psychology and Sociology of National Sentiment and Nationalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), 21.

18 Ghia Nodia, "Natsionalizm i demokratia," *Predely vlasti* no. 4 (1994), <http://old.russ.ru/antolog/predely/4/dem1-1.htm>.

19 Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State*, 41.

20 A. Smith, "State-Making and Nation-Building," in *States in History*, ed. J. Hall (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 263.

Hobsbawm sees the link between nationalism and democracy in the reverse dependence: it is not nationalism that is necessary for democratic system, but, on the contrary, the democratic design of society has created the conditions for the nationalism to acquire mass character. "The major political changes which turned a potential receptivity to national appeals into actual reception were the democratization of politics in a growing numbers of states."²¹ The essence of this dependence is that the "nation" is the most comfortable formation that provides legitimation of democratic regimes as "they derive their legitimacy from the people and from their activity on behalf of people."²² That is why national equality is in the interests of democratic political systems. As Alexander J. Motyl writes, "it would appear highly likely, if not inevitable, that in its appeals to the people, a democratic regime will either emphasize the national characteristics of that people, if it is ethnically homogeneous, or it will attempt to create more or less homogeneous characteristics if the people are ethnically heterogeneous. Legitimacy requires that a strong connection be established between government and 'the' people."²³

The general logic in this interrelation of democracy and nationalism lies in the fact that a common awareness of belonging to a national unit seems to be a prerequisite for democratization. Precisely in this sense nationalism had to be conducive to democratization in the former socialist countries. The national identity, national tradition, and national front are specific agents of democratization, to which Motyl heralded a successful democratic career in the former socialist countries and Soviet republics. "Inasmuch as national identity is rooted in a sense of national community, it automatically provides for a certain amount of societal cohesion. By the same token, national traditions—be they religious, political or exclusively cultural—can underpin the institutions of emergent civil society. Finally, national fronts, which enjoy widespread legitimacy in all the republics, can endow the political arena with stability, as well as generate some of the institutions that must come to populate it."²⁴

Some authors believe that not so much political functioning as the cultural-symbolical and the ethical potential is the reason for a new outburst

21 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 110.

22 Alexander J. Motyl, "The Modernity of Nationalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 45, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 315.

23 Motyl, "The Modernity of Nationalism," 315.

24 Alexander J. Motyl, "Totalitarian Collapse, Imperial Disintegration, and the Rise of the Soviet West: Implication for the West," in *The Rise of Nations in the Soviet Union*, ed. M. Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), 52.

of nationalism. George Schöpflin states that the appeal to the national ideology testifies to the fact that it fulfills certain functions that no other set of ideas, whether communism or democratic liberalism, is able to fulfill. In Schöpflin's opinion, these functions are to be sought in the cultural origins of nationalism, rather than in its political expression. "Every community looks for its moral precepts—the definitions of right and wrong, pure and impure—in its storehouse of cultural values and seeks to defend these from challenges, whether real or perceived. [...] Crucially, it is by the moral-cultural universe that communities define the bonds of loyalty and cohesiveness that hold it together. These bonds, in turn, create the bases of identity which are at the center of a community."²⁵ According to Schöpflin, nationalism essentially does not have so much a political nature, as a cultural one, and in such capacity it becomes the basis for social cohesion. Schöpflin's stance is close to Smith, who believes that it is the "continuing power of myths, symbols and memories of ethnic chosenness, golden ages and historic homelands that has been largely responsible for the mass appeal of ethnic nationalism in the aftermath of the Cold war and the demise of the Soviet empire."²⁶

From this point of view, the role of a mobilizing force of political liberation that nationalism has played in Eastern European countries is not an essential factor. As Frederick Hertz noted in 1951, "the demand for national self-determination is usually represented as one for liberty. Nevertheless national self-determination is by no means identical with political liberty. It does not necessarily imply a democratic regime, but merely freedom from foreign interference."²⁷ That is why, when political and national interests in Eastern and Central Europe begin to be perceived as mutually substituting we face a confusion of the social and the national orders. "Nationalism may be an excellent way of determining identity, but it has little or nothing to say about political participation. [...] In this sense, the demands for autonomy expressed through nationalism—'we should have the right to decide for ourselves because we are members of the Ruritanian nation'— [...] an illustration of the confusion of codes to which Central and Eastern Europe is subject. Theoretically the demand for, say, freedom of the press or assembly cannot be derived from the ethnic aspect of

25 George Schöpflin, "Nationalism and Ethnicity in Europe, East and West" in *Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe*, ed. Ch. Kupchan (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 55.

26 Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 19.

27 Hertz, *Nationality in History and Politics*, 240.

nationhood, although in practice this may not be so clear.”²⁸ In some cases elements of self-perception that claim a particular democratic virtue for the nation are inscribed into the content of national ideologies; however, these are rather conditional and are “in no way necessarily connected with the definition of nationhood.”²⁹ Charles A. Kupchan writes about it in a similar fashion: “Nationalism itself says nothing about the distribution of political power among actors inside the nation-state. Thus, while nationalism can instill ideas that facilitate the functioning democracy, it can also serve as an ideological foundation for authoritarian regimes.”³⁰

Zdeněk Suda concurs with Kupchan when he writes, “nationalism in East Central Europe, although it contributed significantly to the failure of both totalitarian attempts—fascist and communist—at securing regional domination, only unwittingly became an ally of democracy.”³¹ Moreover, referring to the historical experience of the East Central Europe Suda speaks about nationalism as a most dangerous rival of the liberal democratic current in the process of political modernization in this region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This can be explained by the specificity of the political tasks of peoples in that region.

Central Europe for a better part of the nineteenth century was busy shaping and defining its various national identities, which, in the absence of visible geo-political frameworks, was a frustrating full-time job for all the ethnic groups involved. The emancipation of the individual—liberalism’s primary concern—was given a low priority. Proof of the prevalence of interest in collective problems in this region is the peculiar notion of national freedom, understood as the independence and sovereignty of the state and altogether unconnected with individual freedom. Following this notion, it is conceivable to view as free any nation living within the borders of a state that is sovereign in the terms of international law, regardless of the type of political regime—absolutist, authoritarian, even totalitarian—to which its members are subject.³²

28 Schöpflin, “Nationalism and Ethnicity in Europe, East and West,” 53.

29 Schöpflin, “Nationalism and Ethnicity in Europe, East and West,” 56.

30 Charles A. Kupchan, “Introduction: Nationalism Resurgent,” in *Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe*, ed. Ch. A. Kupchan (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 194.

31 Zdeněk Suda, “Liberalism in Central Europe after 1989,” in *The Meaning of Liberalism: East and West*, ed. Zdeněk Suda and Jiří Musil, 202 (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2000).

32 Suda, “Liberalism in Central Europe after 1989,” 204.

It is worth mentioning here Dankwart Rustow's view who wrote that national unity creates conditions for development of an authoritarian regime.³³ As to the mobilizing force of nationalism in Eastern Europe, as George Schöpflin writes, the communist system not only did not destroy nationalist ideology, but, on the contrary, was largely conducive to its preservation. "By sweeping away all other competing ideas, programs and values, which allowed the communists to sustain their monopoly, they made it much easier for an undiluted nationalism referring solely to ethnicity to survive more or less intact, more or less in its original state."³⁴ He proceeds from the premise that in Western societies nationalism had existed together with a variety of other identities (class, economic interests, gender, religion, status, etc.), which in time invariably led to relativization of nationalist demands. Meanwhile in Eastern Europe, as a result of the ideological space cleansing there appeared a tendency "to see all matters as involving ethnic nationhood, whether properly related to nationhood or not."³⁵

33 He understands national unity as a constellation where "a vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be [...] have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political unity they belong." D. Rustow, "Transition to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 69, no. 4 (1970): 337–63.

34 Schöpflin, "Nationalism and Ethnicity in Europe," 53.

35 See arguments in Patrick Dunleavy and Brendan O'Leary, *Theories of the State: the Politics of Liberal Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

Nationalism and Socialism: The Soviet Case

The question about the functions and possibilities of the national ideology's existence in a socialist society divides Western literature into two opposing camps. In one of them the fundamental belief about the Soviet Union is the premise that the revolution pitted communism against nationalism and that the Bolshevik victory was a military conquest by Russians over the authentic national and separatist aspirations of non-Russians. The most influential early interpretation of the national issue in this tradition was given by Richard Pipes in *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923*.¹ In accordance with the canons set up in this book, the Soviet Union was interpreted as a colonial amalgamation of Russia and its frontier regions.² Following the logic of this approach, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse—in her symptomatically titled *The End of the Soviet Empire: The Triumph of the Nations*—wrote about the Soviet Union as an example of a “classic” empire organized around a common ideology (whether monarchy, Christianity, or communism) imposed on everyone by the illusory pretext of a higher power or historical necessity and colonial progress. “The USSR was the last empire of this kind, which gave it considerable might but also condemned it to turn its back on genuine modernization. Once the empire broke up, the nations—each of them—needed to decide the way to go in attempting the hitherto-failed modernization.”³ Simon writes about the disintegration of the Soviet state as a completion of the decolonization process. “What started in 1552 with the first imperial annexation of Mongolian Kazan came to an end with the de-colonization process in the early 1990s. And the political ideology of

1 Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

2 Examples of this approach in literature include Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire: The Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1953); Robert Conquest, *The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: Macmillan 1960); Hugh Seton-Watson, *The New Imperialism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971).

3 Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *The End of the Soviet Empire: The Triumph of the Nations* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 235.

nationalism has proved to be the only possible heir to the failed project of social engineering during the Soviet era.”⁴

A few basic arguments of this approach are worth mentioning. First, Stalin’s policy of deportation, employed in order to weaken certain ethnic groups. Shortly before, during and immediately after World War II, Stalin conducted a series of deportations on a huge scale which profoundly affected the ethnic map of the Soviet Union. At the same time, large number of the Russian-speaking population moved to the Union republics.⁵ Second, it is a high degree of centralization that proved that the essence of tsarist Russia, the subordinate relationship between the periphery and the center, was preserved in the Bolshevik Union. From this perspective, “The USSR became in a certain sense more a prison-house of nations than the old Empire had ever been. [...] The Russian-dominated center established an inequitable relationship with ethnic groups it voluntarily helped to construct.”⁶ Another essential factor of the negative impact of the Soviet national policy was Russification. This was the so-called demographic russification, which resulted in the dispersion of the Russian speaking population throughout the entire territory of the Soviet Union. Another form is linguistic russification. Anderson and Silver distinguish three periods in the evolution of the Soviet language policy. The first period (prior to 1938) they characterize as an egalitarian one, when the development of national languages was strongly supported. The second period (1938–59) they describe as a time when a differentiated bilingual education was adapted, while Russian became a mandatory subject of study in non-Russian schools. In the third period (from 1959 on) the study of Russian became a voluntary act, giving the parents the right to decide for their children.⁷ Indeed as Terry Martin says, this move toward bilingual education signified the beginning of Russification, and Russians became “the first among equal.”⁸

4 Simon G., “Warum zebrach das sowjetische Vielvölkerreich?” in *Der neue Nationalismus: Ursachen, Chancen, Gefahren*, ed. D. Schlegel (Schwalbach, 1994), 100. Cited in Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State*, 72.

5 It is estimated that between 1930 and 1950 nearly 6,6 million were deported to Siberia and the Central Asian republics. Anatolii Vishnevskii, *Demografia stalinskoi epokhi, Naselenie i obshchestvo* no. 70 (2003), http://www.infran.ru/vovenko/60years_ww2/demogr5.htm. See also Robert Conquest, *The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1960).

6 Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State*, 66–67.

7 B. A. Anderson and B. Silver, “Equality, Efficiency and Politics in Soviet Bilingual Education Policy, 1934–1980,” in *The Soviet Nationality Reader: Disintegration in Context*, ed. R. Denber (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 371–72.

8 Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire,” in *A State of Nations*, ed. R. Suny and T. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81.

Pipes's approach stands in direct contrast to those theories that see the Soviet state as "almost all effectively multinational."⁹ As Winderl writes, "the simplistic argument of suppressed nations which slowly awakened in the Gorbachev period belongs, rather, to the nationalist discourse than to historic truth."¹⁰ A paradoxical feature of Soviet history and ideology was the fact that counting on class awareness, it eventually strengthened, and in some cases even created "nations." Ronald Suny describes this phenomenon as a "complex, if less melodramatic, story of nation-building and even nationality formation, which for many peoples of the empire belongs more appropriately to the Soviet period than to the years before the civil war."¹¹ Sergei Maksudov and William Taubman write that the Soviet Union rested on three main pillars—"ideology, dictatorship and nationalism" against the three pillars of tsarist Russia—orthodoxy, autocracy, and *narodnost* [national spirit],¹² thus, giving place to nationalism as a significant premise of state ideology during the Soviet time.

Among theorists who give a relatively positive account for the national development within the framework of the Soviet state were those who subscribed to the modernization theory, which stated that industrialization, whether in a capitalist or in a communist form, fundamentally transformed traditional societies in similar ways. One of the general features of this process was the tendency of substituting "ethnic" or "tribal" identities to give way to a common civic national identity.

American scholar Ronald Suny characterizes the essence of socialist transformation as an alternative design of modernization. The Soviet Union can be considered both as a part of the general process of modernization and as a variation from the Western modernity.¹³ Such an approach, however, is related to a broader understanding of the very category of modernity: various social and political groups in post-Soviet Russia or revolutionary Iran can be considered as offering different combinations of the dominant Western type of the modernity with local or traditional elements. From this perspective, the "great achievement of the Soviet experiment

9 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 168.

10 Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State*, 64.

11 Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past, Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 20.

12 Sergei Maksudov and William Taubman, "Russian-Soviet Nationality Policy and Foreign Policy: A Historical Overview of the Linkage between Them," in *The Rise of Nations in the Soviet Union*, ed. M. Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), 16.

13 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

was the rough modernization of a backward, agrarian society.”¹⁴ Suny sets the Soviet experience against the background of the 1960s Western modernization theory. He acknowledges that the Soviet modernization excluded such aspects as democratic institutions and “a consumer-driven economy.”¹⁵ In another work, Suny makes a curious remark that modernization with its inherent developmentalism became the reason for the Soviet Union’s decline: “When empires, which justified their rule as agents of modernity and modernization, as instruments of development and progress, achieved their stated task too well, supplied their subordinated populations with a language of aspiration and resistance, and indeed created subjects who no longer required empire in the way the colonizers claimed.”¹⁶

George Schöpflin characterizes the transformation of societies in the socialist epoch as a “one-sided modernization revolution.” Although it was a reduced form of modernization it was nevertheless related to those spheres of public life that directly affected nationalism. The first sphere is connected to the changes in the social structure of society. “The communist transformation effectively liquidated the traditional peasantry of the area, of the type bound by the village, illiterate and suspicious of the city and urban life.”¹⁷ As a result, a large section of backward population was subjected to the initial impact of modernization, whether through the market or by the state. The second area is associated with the transformation of communicative facilities in social space: the communist revolution “very effectively extended the power of the state over society and constructed a modern communications network that has allowed the state to reach virtually the whole population, in a way that was not true of the prewar era.”¹⁸ This, in turn, created conditions for a new way of thinking about the “nation” as a whole. At the same time, especially during the first decade of the Soviet rule, a development of national languages as well as a creation of the national cultural environment took place. In the 1920s the Bolsheviks decided that each of the 169 recognized nationalities should have its own language. This decision helped to consolidate the national identities of larger nationalities, and to create new languages based on existing spoken dialects for less developed ethnic groups. As Hélène Carrère D’Encausse writes, an aspect of creating mass popular culture was printing of news-

14 Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 505.

15 Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 505.

16 Ronald Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out,” in *A State of Nations. Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. R. G. Suny and T. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31.

17 Schöpflin, “Nationalism and Ethnicity in Europe,” 54.

18 Schöpflin, “Nationalism and Ethnicity in Europe,” 55.

papers and books in local languages, where, despite the material problems, great efforts were made in the 1920s.¹⁹

From this perspective, non-Western socialist modernization had a considerable impact on nationalism comparable with that the “classic” capitalist modernization had had in creating conditions for nation-building projects. In this context it is quite explicable that the classic of the modernist theory of the nation E. Hobsbawm gives a positive assessment of the Soviet state’s creative functions in relation to a number of nations. In his interpretation many “nations” were designed by the Soviet state. “The idea of Soviet Republics based on Kazakh, Kirghiz [...] ‘nations’ was a theoretical construct of Soviet intellectuals rather than a primordial aspiration of any of those [...] people.”²⁰ In Hobsbawm’s view, the Soviet state created “national contracts” by means of the educational system, media, civil rituals, and so on. The state invented Union Republics and created nations in full accordance with the practice established in other territories.

A number of texts published in *A State of Nations*, edited by Ronald Suny and Terry Martin are devoted to various aspects of the Soviet national policy, and they are united by an attempt to see a positive experience in solution of national problems behind the curtain of a totalitarian political system, as well as to describe the Soviet design of nation-building. Joshua Sanborn—in his chapter on “Family, Fraternity and Nation-Building in Russia, 1905–1925”—suggests that the creation of a Soviet political community was analogous to other nation-making projects, even if it renounced the crucial term of “nation” itself.²¹ In the Soviet state leaders sought a civil national, rather than an imperial or ethno-colonial base for the political community. David D. Laitin, Roger Petersen, and John W. Slocum’s chapters show that state building in the peripheries of the Soviet Union shared many characteristics with state building in France, Britain, and Spain. The major difference was the outcome—a low level of assimilation in the Russian peripheries. These authors emphasize “the general phenomenon of central rulers seeking to pressure peripheral peoples into learning the language of the center.”²² They call this the logic of state rationalization.

19 Hélène Carrère D’Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917–1939* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1992), 173–94.

20 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 166.

21 Joshua Sanborn, “Family, Fraternity and Nation-Building in Russia, 1905–1925,” in *A State of Nations*, ed. R. G. Suny and T. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 93–110.

22 David D. Laitin, Roger Petersen, and John W. Slocum, “Language and the State: Russia and the Soviet Union in Comparative Perspective,” in *Thinking Theoretically About Soviet Nationalities. History and Comparison in the Study of the USSR*, ed. A. J. Motyl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 130.

Smith also gives a positive account of the Soviet style in promoting national (ethnic) identity. As he writes, "Lenin and Stalin provided not only a framework for categorizing the many ethnic groupings within the Soviet territories, but also the sociological basis for their modern redefinition and regeneration. The modern mythmakers were no longer the priests and scribes of the old demotic *ethnie*; their place was taken by the purveyors of language—the poets and philologists, lexicographers and grammarians, historians and novelists, academics and journalists and lawyers, whose *raison d'être* derived from a capacity for critical discourse and for linguistic meanings."²³

Indeed, one of the critical components of the Bolshevik national policy was language policy. It consolidated "nations," equipping them with a powerful instrument of articulation for the national originality. Here one can observe a parallel with nation-building in the nineteenth century: "The central state promoted alphabets for people who had no writing, opened schools for those who had had none under Tsarism, and set up hundreds of national soviets for people living outside their national regions. In ways strikingly similar to the work of patriotic intellectuals on behalf of some nationalities in the nineteenth century, Soviet activists set out to create educational systems and literary languages for their peoples by selecting the dialect to be promoted and by systemizing, refining, and 'purifying' the lexicon."²⁴

In order to capture the complicated matter of national policy in the Soviet state Terry Martin proposes the term "affirmative action Empire."²⁵ In his view, the Soviet Union was "the first of the old European multiethnic states to confront the rising tide of nationalism and respond by systematically promoting the national consciousness of its ethnic minorities and establishing for them many of the characteristic institutional forms of the nation-state."²⁶ When analyzing the Soviet state's ideology and real

23 Anthony Smith, "Ethnic Identity and Territorial Nationalism in Comparative Perspective," in *Thinking Theoretically About Soviet Nationalities: History and Comparison in the Study of the USSR*, ed. A. J. Motyl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 59.

24 Suny, *The Revenge of the Past, Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, 102–3.

25 Author borrows the contemporary U.S. term for policies that give preference to members of ethnic groups that have suffered from past discrimination. Such policies are known internationally and have different names: compensatory discrimination, preferential policies, positive action, and affirmative discrimination. They often accompany decolonization.

26 Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1.

actions directed at the solution of the national issue, he writes that nationalism was understood by main ideologists as a masking ideology that leads legitimate class interests to be expressed in the form of the above class national movement. The treatment of the national question in Bolshevism was governed by understanding that “national identity is not an essential and permanent quality, but rather an unavoidable by-product of the modern capitalist and early socialist world, which must be passed through, before a mature internationalist socialist world can come into being.”²⁷ Martin provides examples of legal support of nationality: Resolutions passed at the Twelfth Party Congress in April 1923 affirmed that the Soviet state would maximally support those forms of nationhood that did not conflict with a unitary central state, namely national territories, national languages, national elites, and national cultures. “Soviet power, was said in resolution of Party Congress in April 1923 which up to the present time has remained Russian power would be made not only Russian but international, and become native [rodnaia] for the peasantry of the formerly oppressed nationalities.”²⁸ In practice, it did this not only through the formation of national territories but also through the aggressive promotion of symbolic markers of national identity: national folklore, museums, dress, food, costumes, opera, poets, progressive historical events, and classic literary works. In this case nationalism was interpreted by Bolsheviks, on the one hand, as a temporary concession to an alternative ideology. As H       Carr     d’Encausse writes, “National cultures were accepted as a transitional phenomenon, a step toward a uniform, common culture that would express the values of the working class and the Party.”²⁹ On the other hand, behind these concessions to nationalism there was pragmatic instrumentalism that counted on a more efficient mobilization of masses. Acknowledgement of the nations’ right to self-determination helped to win the support of non-Russian groups in the Civil War, especially because the principal White leaders supported the restoration of the Russian Empire.³⁰ Besides, granting nationhood to ethnic groups of the tsarist empire was a radical measure meant to completely “disarm” nationalism. Lenin believed that the right to self-determination of nations would prevent nationalism

27 Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire,” in *A State of Nations*, ed. Ronald G. Suny, and Terry Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 72.

28 Stalin, *Marksism, Tainy natsional’noi politiki*, 102 Cited in Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939,” 12.

29 Carr     d’Encausse, *The Great Challenge*, 194.

30 K. Dawisha and B. Parrot, *Russia and the New States of Eurasia: The Politics of Upheaval* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9.

and national consciousness just as “the right to divorce is not an invitation for all women to leave their husbands.”³¹

Different researchers assess the result of this internally contradictory policy in different ways. Some authors believe that a true task of the Soviet policy was to create “the Soviet nation.” From this perspective, the disintegration of the Soviet Union is seen as a failure of the project of designing a homo sovieticus. To paraphrase Mikhail Heller: in the capacity of tools for realization of this project a whole arsenal of state ideology was used—fear, labor, corruption, education, culture, and language.³² At the same time, some authors suppose that the attempt to create Soviet identity did not mean that the Soviet Union was intended to become a true “nation-state.” Due to the excessive centralization, the Soviet Union could not be called a federation, but it was certainly not a nation-state either.³³ In contradiction to the British, Yugoslav, Indian, or U.S. identity, “the Soviet” one has never been viewed as a national identity. The Soviet national policy has never aspired to create “a Soviet nation.” “The Soviet equivalent of the core nationality of a modern nation-state—of German, French or Japanese—was not the “sovetskii narod,” but the Friendship of the Peoples.”³⁴ Ian Bremmer calls this “matryoshka-nationalism” which implies the existence of nations inside a larger nation as a specific phenomenon of soviet nationalism. It gave birth to all national movements.³⁵ As Dawisha and Parrot put it, the federal system chosen by the Bolsheviks “gave the principal ethnic groups an institutional focus for their national identity and reduced their inclination to regard all of the USSR, in equal measure, as their homeland.”³⁶

Rogers Brubaker offered an institutionalist analysis of the Soviet state in which he also emphasized the role of the Bolsheviks in creating national institutions that allowed for rapid nationalist mobilization.³⁷ In his opinion, the myth about the USSR’s comprehensive suppression or elimination of the nations on its territory did not reflect the actual state. On the contrary, “nationhood and nationalism flourish today largely *because of* the regime’s

31 Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–1923* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 8.

32 Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel: The Formation of Soviet Man* (New York: Knopf, 1988).

33 Martin, *An Affirmative Action Empire*, 76.

34 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 450.

35 Ian Bremmer, “Reasserting Soviet Nationalities Theory,” in *Nations, Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, ed. I. Bremmer and R. Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 22.

36 Dawisha and Parrot, “Russia and the New States of Eurasia: the Politics of Upheaval,” 11.

37 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 23–54.

policies. Although *antinationalist*, those policies were anything but *antinational*. Far from ruthlessly suppressing nationhood, the Soviet regime pervasively institutionalized it. The regime repressed nationalism, of course, but at the same time [...] it went further than any other state before or since in institutionalizing territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental categories. In doing so it inadvertently created a political field supremely conducive to nationalism.”³⁸ On the one hand, the Soviet state was divided into over fifty national territories, and each was defined as a “motherland” of a separate ethnonational group. On the other hand, the regime divided the citizens into exhaustive and mutually exclusive nationalities. Thus codified, ethnic nationalities served not only as statistic categories, but also as a necessarily ordered status of the individual. The national-territorial system of the Soviet Union “extended downward into smaller and smaller national territories (national districts, village soviets, collective farms) until the system merged seamlessly with the personal nationality of each Soviet citizen. The result was a grandiose pyramid of national soviets consisting of thousands of national territories of varying sizes.”³⁹

There were two different modes by which nationality and nationhood were institutionalized in the Soviet Union—territorial and political versus ethnocultural and personal. In this manner nationality was institutionalized into social and cultural forms. The Soviet regime suppressed political nationalism, but it established and consolidated “nationhood” and nationality as fundamental cognitive and social forms.⁴⁰ The institutional crystallization of nationhood and nationality were by no means empty forms or legal fictions, although this was how they were viewed by most Sovietologists. “The Soviet institutions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality comprised a pervasive system of social classification, an organizing ‘principle of vision and division’ of the social world to use Bourdieu’s term, a standardized scheme of social accounting, an interpretative grid for public discussion, a set of boundary-markers, a legitimate form for public and private identities, and when political space expanded under Gorbachev, a ready-made template for claims to sovereignty.”⁴¹

* * *

38 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 17.

39 Martin, *An Affirmative Action Empire*, 73.

40 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 18.

41 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 24.

This constructive approach to nation-building within the Soviet state is critical for understanding the developments in post-Soviet Belarus. Acknowledgement of the fact that the Soviet policy has led to shaping a definite format of national identity (and not to its erosion or elimination) makes it possible to assume that it laid the foundation of the official national idea. This enables us to differently estimate the alternative Belarusianness position as a resurgence of the pre-Soviet national tradition and formation of the anti-Soviet version of the national idea. It also allows us to present the current situation in a different light and to speak about contemporary Belarus not in terms of a lack of identity or its weakness, to which the national idea articulated by the oppositional discourse is contrasted, and in relation to which the majority of Belarusians manifest an inexplicable and paradoxical lack of receptivity. It seems more adequate to speak about a coexistence of two national ideas, and each of them appeals to its own concept of Belarusianness. The task of this book is to reveal how in cases of the official and the alternative Belarusianness, different strategies of articulation and manifestation of the national idea work.

The next chapter will trace the historical roots of these concepts. The initial stage of Belarusianness formation was connected with the national movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At this stage of the so-called cultural nationalism, the leading role in the nationalization of Belarusians' consciousness was played by representatives of intelligentsia. It was followed by the transformation of Belarusianness in the process of socialist modernization, in which state institutions and practices were the leading actors. This resulted in the shaping of a kind of matrix of Belarusianness, which after the attainment of independence in 1991, faced the problem of deidentification with Sovietness. Representatives of the new Belarusian nationalist movement and Belarusian authorities have been solving this problem in different ways.

*The First Belarusian Nationalist Movement:
Between National and Class Interests*

The Belarusian national movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an almost classical example of small nation nationalism. Belarusians had no tradition of their own political independence and were dominated by a ruling class of more or less alien nationality—Russian or Polish. Jaroslav Krejci used the term “unrelated state tradition” to describe the tradition of statehood like the Belarusian one. He proposed to evaluate a political history according to the degree “to which it can be related to the respective ethnic group, i.e. whether or not the latter had, over a long period of its history, a state of similar political formation of its own.”¹ He distinguishes four levels of political history:

1. Traditions of statehood are non-existent;
2. Traditions of statehood are unrelated. This applies to cases where an ethnic group shares its political history with another group;
3. Traditions of statehood are interrupted, if the territory was incorporated into an alien political framework for a prolonged period of time;
4. Traditions of statehood can be considered continuous only if an ethnic group had a state of its own over a long period of its history.

Accordingly, for Belarus the unrelated state tradition refers to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Polish–Lithuanian–Belarusian Commonwealth, to tsarist Russia, and to the Soviet Union. The national awakening of Belarusians coincided with the political revolutionary movement in Belarus. The content of nationalist and revolutionary ideologies, too, had much in common due to the class composition of the Belarusian people—Belarusian speakers comprised the majority of the rural population. The concept of national and social liberation reflected essentially different ideas, but they expressed the same aspiration for liberation from suppression.

1 Jaroslav Krejci, “Ethnic Problems in Europe,” in *Contemporary Europe: Social Structures and Cultural Patterns*, ed. S. Giner and M. S. Archer (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 127.

Playwright Dunin-Martinkevich was the first who made his literary career in the Belarusian language. Nearly at the same time F. Bohushevich wrote the basic manifest of the Belarusian national idea. Bohushevich is rightfully considered to be the first songster of the Belarusian revival, as he captured the sentiment and imagination of the new generation. According to Vakar, "in general, he echoed the revolutionary agitation in the empire. But he contended that no cultural and economic development would take root in the country unless the national consciousness of the people was awakened. His poems were a program, as well as an appeal. In the history of the Belarusian national self-determination they mark the beginning of a new period, that of 'cultural nationalism'."² What was truly characteristic of not only the founder of the first wave of Belarusian nationalism but also of all his followers was a combination of revolutionary ideas with the ideas of national revival. "Such was the spirit of the times. [...] The youth of the whole empire was at that time agitated by revolutionary ideas. Bohushevich was the first to give the Belarusian movement its true direction and impulse."³

It was no accident that the agenda of the first Belarusian party—the Byelorussian Socialist Hramada (founded as a Byelorussian Revolutionary Hramada in 1902)—that was adopted at their first meeting at Minsk in 1903 contained the demands both of territorial autonomy for Byelorussia with a popular assembly (*sejm*) in Vilnius and of nationalization of the land of the nobles.

From today's standpoint it is hard to decide which aspect of Belarusian revival was "primary." Siargei Dubavets, a representative of the last wave of the Belarusian national revival in the late twentieth century views the first stage of Belarusian revival as a national project formulated by the heirs of Belarusian nobility who had their property and privileges confiscated and who adopted a form of social protest. In his interpretation, the first project of the Belarusian nation was "bourgeois" (which is entirely congruent with the perception of nationalism as a middle-class ideology). "They closed their protest and resentment in a peasant's coat and wrote about the heavy grievance to the point of bleeding and their lost land. Although it all was fiction. Actually it was the nobility's grievance after their hereditary honor and hereditary property [...] they wanted their own independent country where their grandchildren would never write about 'the wretched land,' like they were writing, thus manifesting their persistent

2 Nicholas P. Vakar, *Belorussia. The Making of a Nation. A Case Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 82–83.

3 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 83.

protest against Russian occupation.”⁴ However with the spirit of the times, the Belarusian nobility’s interests were disguised by social demands. “In early twentieth century our resurgents were faced with a lack of choice. Probably in their hearts they wanted to have quite a normal, ‘bourgeois’ Belarus. But in order to win over popular masses in the atmosphere of hot breathing of Russian revolutionary vagaries, there remained only one option—socialism.”⁵ Realizing the hopelessness of national struggle on any other ground, the first mouthpieces of the national idea “began to wrap their own resentment and grievance into the shape of the rural outcasts’ resentment. Eternal lament is heard from the theatre stage and newspapers pages. About the heavily lot of the peasant, about the poverty-stricken land, about the native tongue and entire Belarus.”⁶ Thus, the initially purely national project, born in the minds of the impoverished Belarusian noblemen, attained its development in the direction of social liberation. As a result, “broad peasant masses recruited into the project, adopted its Belarusian forms, having realized its sense as resentment, which was not nobility-, but proletariat-oriented.”⁷ Dubavets sees the Belarusian national movement as bourgeois movement that concealed its true aspirations under the cover of social struggle. “The cover” actually had become the dominant ideology of the Belarusian national movement. (It is noteworthy to add that Lenin, too, emphasized the bourgeois character of Hramada, though for quite different reasons, he categorized the Belarusian Socialist Union as a “national petty Bourgeois party of a left populist orientation.”)⁸

Ihar Babkou offers a somewhat different picture of Belarusians’ national awakening. “At first glance we observe not so much a national project as a project of social and cultural liberation of the rural population that is categorized as Belarusian and thrice suppressed.”⁹ Babkou intentionally places the forms of suppression in the following order: “First comes the economic suppression, the people resist the extortionate landlords who keep land in their hands. Another suppression is political, for the autocratic political regime does not permit to resort to free forms of representation and to

4 Siargei Dubavets, “Praekt Belarus’,” *ARCHE* 1 (2005): 165, <http://arche.bymedia.net/2005-1/dubaviec105.htm>.

5 Dubavets, “Praekt Belarus’,” 166.

6 Dubavets, “Praekt Belarus’,” 166.

7 Dubavets, “Praekt Belarus’,” 167–68.

8 V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 24 (Moscow: State Printers of Political Literature, 1961), 315.

9 Ihar Babkou, “Genealogia belaruskai idei,” *ARCHE* 3 (2005), 152, <http://arche.bymedia.net/2005-3/babkou305.htm>.

fight for their rights [...] The third suppression is national, because both extortionate landlords and Russian officials speak other languages.”¹⁰ In other words, the national interests of Belarusian people were parallel to the interests of social liberation and could hardly be the main issue on the agenda of the liberation movement. It was also significant that the “national” distinction for the common people was reflected in the language, and national suppression; that is, in the status of the Belarusian language, or rather a ban on it. At that time it was practically the sole recognizable form of Belarusians’ distinction that remained intact, on which national “awakeners” could lean.

N. Nedasek writes that the national language, or to be more precise, national languages brought about nationalization of the revolutionary movement in that period. He writes about the “nationalization mechanism” of the social-democratic movement. He describes the following stages of this process: “(1) The movement adopted ‘the policy relying on the masses;’ (2) Subsequent linguistic nationalization [...] leading to a simultaneous nationalization of consciousness; (3) The appearance of ‘national consciousness’ as a result of the previous trend, and the galvanizing of that consciousness into action; (4) Formulation by this ‘national consciousness’ of the principle of ‘national self-determination including separation,’ i.e. up to ‘national separatism,’ which during that period found its expression in party organizational circles.”¹¹ Nedasek stresses the “instrumental” character of the national issue in the revolutionary movement. In Dubavets’ opinion, on the contrary, it was the appeal to struggle for the social liberation that had an instrumental character for representatives of the “cultural nationalism.” Babkou speaks of a social liberation project that gradually acquired characteristic features of a national liberation movements.

The very possibility to present this process from various viewpoints allows us to assume that in the practice of cultural and revolutionary movement the national and the social ideas are practically indiscernible. Belarusian historian Usievalad Ihnatouski wrote in 1921: “When the 1917 Bolshevik revolution abolished all social distinctions, for the Belarusians this outcome amounted to national liberation because the class and the national composition of Belarusians almost coincided with each other.”¹²

10 Babkou, “Genealogia belaruskai idei,” 152.

11 N. Nedasek, *Bolshevism in the Revolutionary Movement of Belorussia* (Munich: Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1956), 43–44, 145.

12 Usievalad Ihnatouski, “Bielaruskaie natsiianal’naie pytanne i Kamunistychnaia partyia Tezisy,” *Volny Sciah* 6, December 25, 1921, 38–40. Cited in J. Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 77.

The events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Belarus serve an instructive example of the ideological combination of the historical period. They confirm Hobsbawm's words that "various principles on which the political appeal to the masses were based—the class appeal of the socialists, the confessional appeal of religious denominations and the appeal of nationality were not mutually exclusive."¹³ Hroch goes further and writes that class conflicts can more probably lead to real changes if they were supported by ethnic or cultural distinctions and, quite the reverse, "where the national movement was not capable of introducing into national agitation [...] the interests of specific classes and groups [...] it was not capable of attaining success."¹⁴

Among different parties of the social-democratic orientation the Bolshevik party alone had an actively anti-nationalist stance, as for Marx's followers communism and nationalism are theoretically incompatible concepts. Communism affirms that the fundamental identity of the individual is grounded on his or her class position, while nationalism claims that it derives from culture.¹⁵ Negativism in relation to nationalism in the Marxists' position of the nineteenth century was stipulated by their conviction in the priority of class awareness in relation to the national identity, as well as the bourgeois character of the latter.¹⁶ For Marx, nationalism was a historically determined phenomenon that emerged as a result of the rise of capitalism and was primarily a device of the imperialists who could use it as a means to further their own parochial class interests by unifying the entire society. But nations would eventually fade away in favor of a new community based on class solidarity.¹⁷ The conflict between these two ideologies was especially evident in the Bolshevik discourse. As N. Nedasek writes, "the RSDRP [the Russian Socialist Democratic Revolutionary Party] hap-

13 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 123.

14 Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, 185–86.

15 For discussion on this subject, see Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx and Friedrich List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

16 Ian Bremmer proposes somewhat different interpretation of the issue when he writes about the initial ideological affinity between the nationalism and communism, which is expressed in the defining of individual's status: "In states governed by nationalists or communists principles, the individual is important only as the embodiment of collective spiritual values. Man is no more the starting point of communism than he is the starting point of nationalism." Ian Bremmer, "Post-Soviet Nationalities Theory: Past, Present and Future," in *New States, New Politics: Building the Post Soviet Nations*, ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.

17 Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism*, 223.

pened to be the only party on Belarus' territory that avoided "nationalization" and immediately adopted the policy of denationalization."¹⁸

However, this ideological conflict between the internationalism of class struggle and the idea of national revival in the Belarusian case did not play a great role due to the coincidence of the concepts of nationality and class. The Belarusian people almost entirely referred to the social stratum of the "oppressed," this time meaning peasants rather than workers.¹⁹ One can say that for them a change of emphasis in the ideological slogan did not affect the real content of their liberation struggle. This facilitated manipulations with ideological aspects of the revolutionary movements in practice. Moreover, at that time revolutionary ideas of class struggle attracted people thanks to their scale. "The All Russian movement of liberation was catching the imagination of the Belorussian youth who preferred to struggle for a general rather than a provincial ideal, and fight for it on the battlefield of the whole Russian empire. For many, it was more natural to join Russian revolutionary party and to work for an over-all liberation than simply to agitate for 'narrow regional interest'." Indeed, would not freedom for Russia mean also freedom for Belorussia? *Za vašu i našu svabodu* (For your freedom and ours) was the motto of the time.²⁰

Thus, the leaders of the Belarusian national movement found themselves in an ambivalent position: the ideas of national liberation were intertwined into the canvas of the revolutionary practice and had no "pure sounding." With some people, the national aspect of the struggle was fortified by means of the language; the national language for revolutionaries, as Nedasek put it, was capable to reach masses. It was the national language that served as the main marker of belonging to the nation, and a ban to use the national language was becoming another stimulus for getting involved in the liberation struggle. This was the case with some of Byelorussia's neighbors. For example, the ban on Lithuanian-language publications was really "sensed" by some Lithuanian-speaking peasants, becoming therefore useful for nato-

18 Nedasek, *Bolshevism in the Revolutionary Movement of Belorussia*, 141. Nedasek shows in his research that the appearance and crystallization of the Bolshevism was taking place out of any sensible connection and contacts with Belarus, which allows him to conclude that "Bolshevism in Belarus, Belarusian Bolshevism, and national-bolshevism did not come out of the Belarusian Socialist Hramada' or any other local party's interior [...] but its appearance on the political arena of our lands was owed to the external source" Nedasek, *Bolshevism in the Revolutionary Movement of Belorussia*, 89.

19 According to 1897 census data, prevailing majority of Belarusians constituting 63.5 percent of the total population of the five gubernias (Mahilou, Viciebsk, Miensk, Vilnius, and Hrodna) lived in rural areas. Only 2.6 percent lived in the cities. Vakar, *Belorussia*, 34.

20 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 87.

nalists as a factor in their mobilization. But as Timothy Snyder writes, “Here Belarusian activists were again in a worse position. In the Russian empire, no one learned to read in Belarusian in church or in school. Belarusians who were literate could already read Polish and Russian. The ban on Belarusian publications was thus of little use to Belarusian activists. No one missed Belarusian as people missed Lithuanian.”²¹ This diminished the effectiveness of national slogans, so in Belarus “literary nationalism was out of date, and political nationalism out of place.”²²

The situation somewhat changed after 1905. “The epoch of individuals” was replaced by the period of increasing national awareness in society. To use Hroch’s classification, it was Phase B (the period of patriotic agitation). Legalization of the Belarusian press, the possibility to publish Belarusian texts, the emergence of a number of young authors who originated from the lower social strata created conditions for a more clear articulation of the Belarusian national revival ideas. In September 1906 the weekly *Nasha Dola* (Our lot)—the first legal Belarusian paper—began to be published. This periodical, intended for “rural and urban workingmen,” was printed partly in Russian, partly in Polish characters. After six issues it was suspended by the government for its “revolutionary and separatist ideas.” It was replaced by *Nasha Niva* (Our field), “the first Belarusian newspaper with illustrations.” *Nasha Niva* was published until 1915 and in Jan Zaprudnik’s words, imprinted its name on the period of Belarusian history between 1906–1915 —“nashaniustva.”²³ Ties were established in the provincial cities and villages. In three years, the weekly printed 960 items of correspondence from 489 villages, 246 poems by sixty-one poets, and 91 stories by different authors.²⁴ Although the newspaper was not an official organ of any party, it became the center of Belarusian cultural life. It gathered a large circle of young authors who later became classics of Belarusian literature. “In fact, modern Belarusian Literature began with it and in it.”²⁵

On the one hand, *Nasha Niva*’s publishers declared their commitment to the national idea, emphasizing community on the national ground: “Do not think that we wish to serve only the gentry, or the peasants. No, never! We want to be servants of the whole long-suffering Belarusian nation.”²⁶

21 Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 47.

22 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 85.

23 Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1993), 64.

24 Cited in Vakar, *Belorussia*, 88.

25 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 88.

26 Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 64.

The rhetoric of the national revival required an appeal to the time when Belarusians had “their own” Belarusian princes, nobility, high political standing, and literary achievements. However, the topic of the former glory and the high status of Belarusian aristocracy (*shlyakhta*) and its cultural attainments hardly agreed with the spirit of the time and with the ideas of liberation of common people from oppression. Therefore the question was rather of their awakening to national awareness than engrafting the old Belarusian aristocratic culture to them. As a result, the predominant leit-motif of the Belarusian authors’ creative work in and around *Nasha Niva* became hard life on the native land, injustice, and social inequality.

Quite remarkable was the picture of the social structure of the national movement. Dvarčanin divided all writers of the period into six categories: 1) writers of “transition” from the previous period who continued in the tradition of Dunin-Marcinkevič, Bohusevič, or Nesluchoŭski [...] (Jadvihin, Kahanec, Paŭlovich); 2) peasants, who formed the largest group, among them Kupala, Kolas, Četka, Harun, Lėsik; 3) one proletarian Ciška Gartny; 4) one “bourgeois” F. Aliachnovič; 5) nine intellectuals, among them Maksim Bahdanovič, M. Harecki, Z. Veras; and 6) ten “others” of widely assorted occupations, some of them not even of Byelorussian origin (Sary Ulas, Shantyr).²⁷ It was important that “rustic element should have prevailed. Even the intellectuals in Dvarčanin’s classification hardly rise above the rural level of literacy.”²⁸ Belarusian national ideology was entirely the product of “organic intelligentsia,” to use Gramsci’s term, who wrote that history “was made by intelligentsia and by intellectual elites conscious of being organically linked to a national-popular mass.”²⁹ For most of them, “literature meant social protest rather than artistic expression, and their poems were rhymed comments on contemporary conditions of life. Their lyrics were simple, unsophisticated, and told the elemental love of the peasant for his land. This was precisely what the Belorussian reader could understand and what he appreciated.”³⁰

The image of the “Belarusian” who existed in poverty, depression, and suffering was shrouded into literary forms. This prototype of the literary Belarusian acquired a new hypostasis—that of the Belarusian national character, in place of the national hero. Belarusianness appeared to be inscribed into the framework of social inequality, or rather it was built on

27 I. Dvarčanin, *Khrestamatyia novai belaruskai literatury* (Vilnius, 1927), 483–97. Cited in Vakar, *Belorussia*, 90.

28 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 90.

29 A. Gramsci quoted in J. Joll, *Antonio Gramsci* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 124.

30 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 90.

the foundation of its negation. It should be noted that in Belarus the ideology of socialism fell into fertile soil. The Belarusian philosopher U. Konan wrote that the connection of Belarusianness with socialism had deep roots in the consciousness of Belarusians stipulated by their social status. In his work devoted to an analysis of archetypes of Belarusian mentality on the materials of the national mythology and fairy tales, he wrote: "From the perspective of political self-awareness, the Belarusian mystic and 'domestic' tales display ideas of popular rural socialism [...] The hero of the fairytale literature is not the son of czar, prince of merchant, he is a simple peasant's son. [...] This tradition powerfully affected the Belarusian mentality, exposed in the national literature—from K. Kalinouski and F. Bahushevich to Elaiza Pashkevich (Cětka), Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas."³¹ This tradition turned out to be reflected not only in literary forms of imagined Belarusianness, but also in its general ideological and political projects.

A peculiar feature of the new Belarusian project formulated at the time was its specific filtration of the cultural memory that reflected on the image of Belarusianness. In *The Social Framework of Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs wrote about the difference between the memories of different social classes. In his view the collective memory has different objects and functions in different ways dependent on which social class plays the role of the subject-carrier. Different social strata behave in different fashion in the arts and in life with regard to the content and the values of the cultural tradition, because they have different values themselves. According to Halbwachs, the high and the low strata differ because the former deals mainly with the people, and the latter, with the things. Society, or, to be more specific, the relevant social classes create definite frameworks of memory that form a basis for experience and evaluation of the modern life. According to Halbwachs, "the most important collective memories are born and preserved in the part of society that is not involved in professional work."³² Therefore, it is the higher social stratum, aristocracy and later bourgeoisie, who preserve certain values and knowledge.

In this context one can presume that the cultural project of the Belarusian nation formulated by Belarusian nationalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was based on a certain type of memory, the memory of the lower social stratum, which inevitably led to a filtration of the Belarusian cultural tradition. The formation of the cultural tradition

31 U. Konan, "Arkhetypy belaruskaga mentalitetu: sproba rekanstruktsyi pavodle natsi-anal'nai mifalogii i kazachnaga epasu," *Belarusika Albaruthenica* no. 2 (1992): 27.

32 Maurice Halbwachs, *Společné ramy paměti* (Warsaw: PWN, 1969), 357.

within the national project of the time was based on the generalization of peasant class culture.

One of the main instruments and, at the same time, a victim of this filtration was the language. The Belarusian literary language began to develop in the nineteenth century on the folk foundation, without any connection with the literary language of prior generations. Many historians write about the high status and level of development of Belarusian in the seventeenth century.³³ However, this language "having achieved the highest level of development both in the structural and the functional respects by early seventeenth century and even making an effect on the Russian language in a way, had gradually declined and went out of use as a result of the cultural and historical circumstances of the time."³⁴ At the same time the rise and fall of the Belarusian literary language is considered as a classical, if not a unique example of the extra-linguistic factors' impact on the language. "The striking feature of the language which became Byelorussian is that it evolved an extensive and important language, then lost it only to develop a later written language but on a different basis."³⁵ Among historical factors there can be mentioned polonization within Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and russification within the Russian empire. But the fact that the Belarusian revival was built on the repudiation of the "old" literary language (and with it, of all that had been created in that language) was to a great extent connected with the revolutionary trends of the time and dictated by the spirit of the struggle for social equality. The cultural legacy of Old Belarusian was a creation of higher social strata and, because of that, it could not serve as another stimulus for mobilization of the national awareness of popular masses in the era of revival.

The appeals to a class consciousness and to a folk language were in fact the only possible sources in the formulation of the national project, more so because at that time Belarusians did not have a distinct religious basis of their own. This situation was a result of numerous upheavals in the religious history on these lands caused by shifts in authorities and different eras of cultural and political dominations. Historically, the Orthodox faith was the most spread religion on the Belarusian lands between the tenth

33 "As to the wealth of the old linguistic material, the West Russian language occupies the first place next to the Great Russian language, as to the ancient published books it even surpasses the latter." F. E. Karski, *Belarusy. Vvedenie v izuchenie iazyka i narodnoi slovesnosti* (Vilnius, 1904), 343.

34 A. I. Zhuravskii, "Utvarenie belaruskai movy i iai razvits'tse," in *Belarus' na miazhy tysiachagoddziau* (Minsk: Belaruskaiia entsiklopedia, 2000), 57.

35 A. G. Waring, "The Influence of Non-Linguistic Factors on the Rise and Fall of the Old Byelorussian Literary Language," *The Journal of Byelorussian Studies* 4, nos. 3-4: (1980): 129.

century and the sixteenth century. This religion was bearing the sense of religious commonness of the Duchy's Orthodox lands with the Muscovy, and the dukes of Grand Duchy of Lithuania were aware of this. They repeatedly tried to build up the autonomy of the Duchy's Orthodox Church during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, only the creation of the Uniate Church several centuries later could be considered a success story of this separation.

During the Reformation, numerous Belarusian magnates adopted Calvinism. Its teachings brought religious postulates to real life and oriented its adepts at a more conscious perception, which enabled Calvinism to play a positive role in the cultural development of Belarusians. At the beginning of the sixteenth century Calvinism gained adherence among businessmen, trades people, and artisans in many towns. "Lively debates evoked by the Reformation and a flood of polemical publications turned out by numerous printing houses contributed significantly to the development of the Belarusian literary language, which would eventually become the basis for the modern Belarusian revival after the 'twilight zone' of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century."³⁶ The Belarusian historian S. Akinchits calls Reformation the golden age of Belarusian history, the historical and cultural experience which links Belarusians with Europe.

The sixteenth century, the century of Reformation changed the history and introduced progress and well-being in the life of many peoples. The whole world considers this period as a time when the foundation of modern economy, politics, sciences and culture were laid down. For Belarus, too, this century played an exceptional role. Namely, this period saw the most important development here. In a certain sense we are a nation of the sixteenth century. [...] Having accepted the Reformation ideas, having turned to the Bible and personal relations with the Lord, Belarusian society experienced a great rise in various sphere of its life. Schools and books publishing propagated, together with legal and political ideas which even today impress us. When we compare the development of various European countries of the sixteenth century, we may see that Belarus—the Grand Duchy of Lithuania moved in the same direction as England—the same development of the local self-government, the same adoption of the Reformation by the top members of society, the same economic activity of magnates and the szlachta (in England—lords and the gentry).³⁷

36 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 34.

37 S. Akinchits, *Zalaty vek Belarusi*, <http://knihi.com/bel/zalaty.html>.

Akinchits refers to the Russian researcher of the Reformation in Belarus V. Pliss, who admitted in his studies that “in the early 1560s, the Calvinist consciousness was on the level of dominating faith and was gaining powerful roots here.”³⁸

The spread of Reformation was linked to a greater involvement of Belarusian lands into the orbit of European cultural and economic universe. During that period “cultural development in Belarus, as part of the Grand Duchy in union with Poland, was influenced by ties with Western Europe, to which Belarusian merchants shifted their trade as a result of wars with Muscovy during most of the sixteenth century. The demand by European market for agricultural products and goods from forests in the East fueled the economic growth and prosperity of the cities of Vilnius, Bierascie (Brest), Polacak, Miensk, Hrodna, and others. The nobility and burgers could afford to send their sons to study at the universities of Koenigsberg, Heidelberg, Leipzig, Louvain, Basel and Padua.”³⁹ These contacts brought Renaissance humanistic ideas to Belarus and largely influenced the development of native culture.

The decline of the Reformation on the Belarusian lands was related not only to the active Catholic counteraction to Protestantism, but was also linked to the wars that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania led with the Moscow state, which caused large numbers of casualties among town dwellers—the most active population during the Reformation and reduced the number of nobles who adhered to Luther’s and Calvin’s ideas.

The next stage of Belarusian religious history was connected with the creation of a religious union between the Orthodox and Catholics within the Commonwealth. In 1596 the council of clergy and laymen recognized the supreme authority of the pope and accepted some fundamental dogmas of the Catholic Church while preserving the Eastern-rite liturgy. “Such union,” J. Zaprudnik writes, “was much desired as a unifying factor in a state where vast eastern territories shared the same East Christian rite with the covetous Muscovy.”⁴⁰

Evaluation of this phenomenon of a religious compromise between the two branches of Christianity in the context of Belarusian national development remains ambiguous even today. However, many authors agree that in the situation when Catholicism became increasingly identified as the Polish faith, and Orthodox as the Russian one, the Uniate Church gave Belarusians a chance to obtain a true “national religion.” The Belarusian histo-

38 V. Pliss, *Istoricheskii ocherk pronikonovenia i raprostranenia Reformatsii w Litve i Zapadnoi Rusi* (St Petersburg, 1914), cited in Akinchyts, *Zalaty vek Belarusi*.

39 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 37.

40 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 35.

rian Leonid Lych writes: "If the Catholic Church since the very beginning and the Orthodoxy since the moment of dependence of Moscow power had been instruments of denationalization of spiritual life of Belarusians, the Uniate Church was attentive to their historic traditions, culture and the language, assisted the ethnic national consciousness of the indigenous population of our land."⁴¹

"The introduction" of a new version of Christian religion into practical religious life was often connected with violence. "Just as Protestants a century earlier had taken over Catholic churches, now the Uniates, instigated and supported by state authorities did the same to Orthodox shrines."⁴² In order to escape a forcible conversion into the Uniate Church, many Belarusians moved to Ukraine.

The Uniate Church preserved many aspects of Orthodox religious rituals, combining them with the use of the Belarusian language in the education and sermons. Due to the focus on the native language of the ordinary people the Uniate Church served as a bridge between the national culture and the Christian inheritance. As Belarusian (alternative) historians U. Arlou and G. Saganovich write, it had become a "holder" of the Belarusian cultural values and focused the spirit of the national cultural development.⁴³

By 1839, when the Uniate Church in Belarus was forcibly converted to Russian Orthodoxy after the incorporation into the Russian empire, more than 80 percent of the Belarusian peasantry belonged to the Uniate Church. The history repeated itself. "Violence at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when Orthodox individuals were being forced into the religious union of 1596, returned two centuries later to avenge itself on the innocent."⁴⁴ At the same time, surprisingly, at the beginning of their rule on Belarusian lands the Russian policy allowed the Belarusian gentry to drift toward Polish high culture, however, "it removed the religious basis for a popular notion of a distinct Belarusian nation."⁴⁵ The liquidation of the Uniate Church was followed by the ban of the names Belarus and Litva from the official use in 1840. Furthermore, in 1827 conversion of Uniates to Catholicism was forbidden by a decree. Polonization affected mainly

41 Leonid Lych, "Religia i natsiional'naiia samasviadomast' belarusau," *Belarusika Alba-ruthenica* no. 2 (1992), 68.

42 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 38.

43 Uladzimir Arlou and Genadz Saganovich, *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862-1918* (Vilnius: Nasha Buduchynia, 1999), 186.

44 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 50.

45 Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*, 45.

higher levels of the population, and by the time of Belarusian national revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the major part of the Belarusian population was again Orthodox. Participation in the national movement of the Polish clergy or the members of the national intelligentsia who were often brought up in Catholic families further complicated the situation—Catholics on these lands were often represented by landowners, Catholics spoke Polish, even if they belonged to the Belarusian ethnos. Absence of a sole religious basis as a distinct form of national determination led to an enhanced role of the only obvious signs of Belarusian distinction of that moment—the social class and the language.

It is noteworthy to mention here Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, in which he analyzes how peculiarities of the social experience determined the specific outlook of the peasantry. "As the world of commerce and industry began to undermine the structure of the village community, the European peasants reacted with a form of radicalism that stressed the themes of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but in a way distinct than that the townsmen, more specifically the more prosperous bourgeoisie, understood these themes. [...] For the peasant, the first of the three was not liberty but equality. [...] Liberty, too, meant getting rid of the overlord who no longer gave them protection but now used his ancient privileges to take away their land or make them work on his for nothing."⁴⁶ Moore does not limit his research to Western European history, he also makes use of materials devoted to the study of Russian peasantry. The concept of "liberty" here, too, was subjected to reduction. First desire of the Russian peasant in the nineteenth century was to stop working on the overlord's property for nothing. Since they felt that the tie between their own society and the overlord exploited them, they wanted to break the connection and run the village community themselves. This was their main conception of "true liberty."⁴⁷ The observation concerning the general tendency for a local interpretation of "liberty" and a greater accent on equality rather than liberty or fraternity revealed in peasantry can also be applied to the rise of a national liberation and revolutionary movement in Belarus. Popular masses responded to the idea of possible liberation from social and economic oppression and achievement of universal equality.

46 Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 497.

47 Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960), 211, 218; cited in Barrington, 502–3.

In the symbolic matrix of Belarusianness, which was taking shape in that historical period, national ideas appeared closely united with the ideas of socialism. Foremost among them was social equality, which in the minds of the Belarusian population—90 percent of which was made up of peasants—was far more significant than “liberty” or “fraternity.” Thus, the appeal to social equality in the late twentieth century in the official discourse of Belarusianness has historical roots that go back not only to the socialist era, but into the pre-Soviet period of national movement. Not accidentally, the young poets Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas who were among the members of the *Nasha Niva* group, became classics of the national literature in Soviet Belarus. This testifies to the absence of a clear ideological contradiction between the ideas of national revival formulated in the early twentieth century and the Belarusian socialist project that was developed within the Soviet state. It also signifies that broad masses of population, to whom the nationalist appeal was addressed, often remained outside this movement.

At the same time, as historians testify, political organization of the national Belarusian movement remained extremely low. As N. Vakar writes, “For many people nationalism remained a cultural project, not a political programme. It would seem that Belorussian people recognizing the cultural significance of nationalist propaganda willfully rejected its political implications. During the ten years of constitutional regime in Russia not a single deputy from Belorussia ever mentioned his specific Belorussian consciousness, although Polish, Lithuanians, Armenians, Tatar and other nationals spoke freely of theirs.”⁴⁸

The real nationalization began under Soviet rule. The Byelorussian Republic was made up by Bolsheviks in January 1919. The “Sovereign” Soviet Byelorussian Republic (BSSR), composed at that time of six counties of Minsk province, with a population of approximately 1.5 million. On January 1920, BSSR concluded “a treaty of alliance” with the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. Vilhelm Knoryn, a representative of the Bolshevik movement, wrote in 1924: “The period of German occupation was at the same time a period of absorption by the masses of the idea of Byelorussian independence, to which the Party should have given its attention. Under these circumstances the Party organizations of Moscow and Smolensk became convinced almost simultaneously that the establishment of the Byelorussian Republic was necessary immediately.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Vakar, *Belorussia*, 87.

⁴⁹ Vilhelm Knoryn, *Kamunistychnaia partyia na Bielarusi* (Minsk, 1924), 219; cited in Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 70.

*Byelorussian Republic within
the Soviet State*

Many researchers of the period following 1917 concur in their appraisal of the course of events as a tactical and largely forced decision by the Bolsheviks. N. Vakar states that the founding of the Belorussian Republic served a double purpose: (1) to attract into and maintain within the Soviet system those elements of the population to which the communist idea might not otherwise appeal, and (2) to integrate their nationalism with the world revolutionary forces.¹ Hélène Carrère D'Encausse gives another explanation for the Bolshevik decision. In her view, Bolshevik leaders were ignorant of the realities of Belarus. The decision about its independence was a result of hasty and uninformed decisions rather than a rational policy choice. Moreover, the independence and subsequent Union with Lithuania in early February 1919 served Lenin's purposes to both appease and divide non-Russian ethnic groups, and resulted in a state unit where the majority of the population favored Russia.² The Belarusian historians Uladzimir Arlou and Genadz Saganovich believe that the decision to grant Belarusians independent status—whatever that meant at the time—was adopted under the influence of the attempt to create the BPR (Belaruskaja Narodnaia Respublika, Belarusian People's Republic) ventured by Belarusian nationalists.³ The BPR became the first independent state unit of Belarusians, proclaimed under the German occupation. It existed for only a short period between March 1918 and January 1919. The Polish historian Eugeniusz Mironowicz describes the Belarusian People's Republic "as an idea that was sooner expected to be incarnated in reality than a real political phenomenon. However, owing to its concept of sovereign state existence related to a certain territory and populated by an ethnically defined community started to function in the consciousness of the Bela-

1 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 139.

2 Carrère D'Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917–1939*, 86.

3 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 220.

rusian political elite.”⁴ Although its existence was short, the BPR did make the Belarusian national aspirations visible to others, and the Bolsheviks preferred not to ignore it out of tactical considerations. The Belarusian historian Usievalad Ihnatouski assumed that behind the sudden change of heart among top Bolsheviks in favor of Belarusian statehood there was a desire to “Bolshevize the Belarusian masses.”⁵ The Russian historian (of Belarusian origin) Nikolai Zenkovich discusses that as some newly-opened to public historical documents prove, most of those that were officially presented as “founders” of the Byelorussian Soviet statehood were in fact opposed to the idea of the Byelorussian Republic. A. F. Miasnikov⁶ considered that the Belarusian oblast within the Russian state would be enough and in Cherviakov’s⁷ opinion Belarusians would be glad to have autonomy within the Russian Federation. At that historical moment it was Lenin who insisted on the creation of the Byelorussian Soviet Republic. As Zenkovich writes, the reason behind this is that the Russian state needed a “buffer” and that was the role the Byelorussian Republic was assigned to play according to the Russian leaders’ scenario.⁸

Belarusian nationalists, after a short period of hesitation, accepted the creation of the BSSR. Many of them held leading posts in the national government (like Zhylunovich, formerly an active member of the *Nasha Niva* group, who became president of the Byelorussian Soviet government). As N. Vakar notes, “the country might have a wrong system of government, but it was now a *state* equal in right, dignity, and honor with Russia itself.”⁹ In 1925 the government of the BPR in exile decided to disband and to pass on its symbolic power to the government of the BSSR. Thus, the creation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was supported by representatives of the national movement, because in a way their aspirations attained their end in this republic. As the American-Ukrainian historian Ivan Lubachko wrote, Belarusians “idealized the new state, believing that in the Soviet Union the class of workers and the class of peasants represen-

4 Eugeniusz Mironowicz, “Białorusini wobec państwa polskiego w latach 1918–1925,” *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne* 1 (1994), http://kamunikat.org/bzh.html?pub_start=20&pubid=1026.

5 Usievalad Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi* (Minsk: Belarus’, 1991), 178.

6 One of the leaders of the 1917 October Revolution in Minsk, first Chairman of the Belarusian Central Executive Committee (1919), First Secretary of the Central Bureau of the Belarusian Communist Party (from 1920).

7 Chairman of the Belarusian Central Executive Committee between 1920–1937.

8 Nikolai Zenkovich, *Ch’ia Belarus’* (Moskva: MK-Periodika, 2002), 58–59.

9 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 138.

ted a united power which stood above that of the state, and that every nation of the Soviet Union identified itself with this power of the people as a whole.”¹⁰

However, there was another actor in these historical developments—the Belarusian people. As many researchers observe, the creation of the Belarusian Republic was far from universally accepted by the popular masses. Moreover, as Terry Martin writes, many Belarusian peasants were bitterly opposed to the formation of the Byelorussian Republic.¹¹

Vadim Krutalevich describes various “local” reactions to the proclamation of the Byelorussian Republic. He exemplifies positive enthusiasm with some archive evidence: “We greet our formerly suffering and now liberated beloved Belarus and hope that the concerted efforts of workers and peasants will result in the erection of a beautiful building of the BSSR on the principle of social justice and brotherly community of the working people of the whole world. (Protocol of the Bykhov country convention of Soviets).”¹²

However, he also gives numerous examples of a negative attitude to the creation of the Byelorussian Republic. One of the main arguments of those against it was the fact that Belarusians allegedly did not present a self-sustained nation with all the necessary attributes. “It is ridiculous to inoculate the population with some Belarusian language, which no Belarusian knows. Self-determination of Byelorussia will be playing into the hands of the local intelligentsia that ‘invents Byelorussia,’ no workers or peasants of the so-called Byelorussia consider themselves a Byelorussian, but from time immemorial know, they are Russians. Nobody speaks any Byelorussian, it is not a language, but a jargon, that is why self-determination of Byelorussia is out of the question. (Proceedings of Vitebsk Province Soviet, January 16, 1919).”¹³ Similar opinions were registered in Mogilev. The newspaper *Sokha i Molot* wrote that the Byelorussian language “had died for the Byelorussian people allegedly centuries ago and we, Byelorussians, have long forgotten it and now don’t understand it” (February 8, 1919).¹⁴

10 Ivan. S. Lubachko, *Belorussia under Soviet Rule (1917–1957)* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 189.

11 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, 160.

12 Vadim Krutalevich, *Rozhdenie Belorusskoi Sovetskoi Respubliki, Razvertyvanie natsionalno-gosudarstvennogo stroitelstva. Noiabr 1918–fevral 1919* (Minsk: Nauka i tekhnika, 1979), 169.

13 Krutalevich, *Rozhdenie Belorusskoi Sovetskoi Respubliki*, 171–72.

14 Krutalevich, *Rozhdenie Belorusskoi Sovetskoi Respubliki*, 173.

Krutalevich also refers to the statement by V. G. Knoryn, the chief historian- grapher of the BSSR and the leader of the October rising in Belarus at the Western Front; in the 1920s he was a secretary of the Central Bureau of the Communist Party of Byelorussia. In Knoryn's words, "The idea of the national being and independent existence was so alien to Byelorussian masses, had so few roots in the popular consciousness that the party or, more exactly, its guiding organs, were hardly able to convince the Province Committee in the necessary self-determination of Belarus, and the Province Committee. Later renamed into the Central Bureau of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, it had to strain even more effort to convince representatives of working Byelorussia in this necessity at the First Congress of its Soviets."¹⁵

These examples show that the national agitation and propaganda initiated by Belarusian nationalists did not approach the phase when the ideas of national revival penetrated the masses. Nationalism remained the matter of a small circle of people. One can assume that it was just a question of time for nationalist ideas to get a broad response and become part of Belarusian people's conviction. But history did not allot enough time for that and the process of nationalization of Belarusians was carried on by the Soviet state with all its inherent peculiarities. Here the task of the cultural Enlightenment, education, and formation of the national consciousness was being solved with the help of the state, based on its institutions and often tied to the socialist ideology, the way it was understood by the consequent Soviet leaders.

In this context, quite explicable there appear the conclusions of H  l  ne Carr  re D'Encausse, when she writes that in 1919 "it was the Bolsheviks who wanted independence, which was only half-heartedly demanded by the Byelorussians."¹⁶ In her opinion, "in 1917 a true Byelorussian nation did not exist. Ethnographic map attests to the fact that in the nineteenth century it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to identify a Byelorussian nation because of a great number of Poles, Lithuanians, and Jews who lived among Byelorussians. The Byelorussian Bolsheviks, in their desire to short-circuit both separatism and the orientation toward Poland, argued that Byelorussia should be granted the status as a nation, even if masses felt utterly indifferent. They easily succeeded in convincing the Bolsheviks in Moscow to respect the wishes of what in fact was a rather meager elite."¹⁷

15 Krutalevich, *Rozhdenie Belorusskoi Sovetskoi Respubliki*, 147.

16 Carr  re D'Encausse, *The Great Challenge*, 87.

17 Carr  re D'Encausse, *The Great Challenge*, 85.

Meantime, the Byelorussian government declared a hardline in realization of nationalization of the public life: the Byelorussian nationality was declared predominant and Belarusian became the official language. The network of obligatory Belarusian courses was created and the return of Belarusian nationalists was encouraged. The BSSR reported to the USSR Soviet of Nationalities in 1925 that in the central agencies of the republic only 26.9 percent of the employees spoke Belarusian. In 1926 the number had risen to 54 percent, and to 80 percent by 1928. Moreover, by the beginning of 1928, in general, Byelorussification was entirely completed in the central, province, and district institutions.¹⁸ The press became almost exclusively Belarusian. As the Polish historian Eugeniusz Mironowicz writes, "The attitude to the Byelorussian language and culture changed considerably. Byelorussian was no longer a language of peasants but a language of the state. For practical reasons knowledge of Byelorussian became compulsory."¹⁹ By 1929 there was only one exclusively Russian language newspaper and no Russian-language journals. In the education system there were 28.4 percent Byelorussian language schools in 1924–25 and 93.8 percent in 1929–1930. At that time, "Kupala's portrait was hung alongside Lenin's in every Byelorussian school."²⁰

The Institute of Byelorussian Culture was founded in Minsk in 1921 and transformed in 1928 into the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences with seven departments and eight committees on research in archeology, history, ethnography, folklore, music, fine arts, language, and natural resources. Then came the State University, the State Publishing Office (*Dom Knihi*), the National Theatre, the Agricultural Academy, the School of Medicine, the Veterinarian Institute, several teachers' colleges, museums, centers for adult education, and other institutions. "In these days," Vakar writes, "the Belorussian culture, though Socialist in form, was unqualifiedly nationalist in content—all Belorussian writers, even those most outspokenly anti-Soviet, agree on this."²¹ As Terry Martin notes, the result of the first period of Belarusian nation-building within the Soviet state was "the remarkable success of Byelorussization."²² He also notes that Hroch's model of three

18 *Osnovnye itogi raboty pravitelstva Soiuzs SSR; K perevyboram sovetov 1928–1929 gg.* Moscow, 1928.

19 Mironowicz, "Kształtowanie się struktury narodowościowej w BSSR (1921–1939)," *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne* 22 (2004), http://kamunikat.org/bzh.html?pub_start=0&pubid=2196.

20 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 160, 264.

21 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 145.

22 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 261.

phases of national movement among stateless nations of Eastern Europe ignored the existing multiethnic state, automatically assuming it would oppose these developments. The national policy of the first decade of Soviet history revealed a different picture. "The Soviet state instead literally seized leadership over all the three phases: the articulation of national culture, the formation of national elites, and the propagation of mass national consciousness. It went still further and initiated even 'phase D' (my term now [TM]— not Hroch's) measures typical of newly formed nation-states, establishing a new language of state and a new governing elite. To use more familiar Bolshevik terminology, the party became the vanguard of non-Russian nationalism."²³

Descriptions of the nation-building of that era fit the scheme of nation formation that was conducted by the state through the practices of standardization, with the help of the education system and other attributes of modernizing practices, albeit in the socialist mode. Hobsbawm and other modernists with reason write about the constructive influence of the Soviet state on the nations that were part of it. "It was the communist regime which deliberately set out to create ethno-linguistic territorial 'national administrative units,' i.e. 'nations' in the modern sense, where none had previously existed or been thought of (among them were also Byelorussians)."²⁴ In the Soviet state there was the process of modernization of the whole society with a simultaneous design of a national form of social and cultural life. As Eugeniusz Mironowicz writes, "several years of liberal Bolshevik rule in the 1920s were conducive to a creation of an almost national Belarusian state on the territory of Soviet Belorussia. Belarusian activists, with the agreement of Soviet authorities were able to realize the most courageous ideas they had dreamed about at the First All-Belarusian Assembly in December 1917. Their achievements in the sphere of Belarusization were not demolished in the 1930s."²⁵ At the same time, national development of the Belarusians living on the territory of the Polish state was somewhat different. Belarusians faced the "aspirations of the Polish political elite to create their own state organization that would incorporate part or the whole territory of Belarus,"²⁶ which could lead to

23 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 15.

24 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 166.

25 Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Białoruś. Historia państw świata w XX wieku* (Warsaw: TRIO, 1999), 8.

26 Eugeniusz Mironowicz, "Białorusini wobec państwa polskiego w latach 1918–1925," *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne* 1 (1994), http://kamunikat.org/bzh.html?pub_start=20&pubid=1026.

an inevitable conflict between the Polish and the Belarusian stances. Against this background, the started mechanism of nationalization of public and cultural life in the Soviet Byelorussia looked fruitful enough. "The systematic studies of national geography, natural resources, history, and literature, albeit in Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist terms, and the existence of normal attributes of statehood, have strengthened the feeling of separate Byelorussian identity."²⁷ It was no accident, as Jan Zaprudnik writes, that Belarusian nationalists in the 1990s dreamed about "the repetition of Belarusization, a cultural phenomenon of the 1920s."²⁸

The intensive nationalization of the 1920s was replaced by a new epoch. In 1929, *Zwiazda* newspaper published an article declaring that Byelorussian nationalism was now the greatest danger in Byelorussia.²⁹ The new constitution of the USSR of the mid-1930s was known by the ubiquitous metaphor of "the Friendship of the Peoples." One of the major features of the Friendship of the Peoples was rehabilitation of the traditional Russian culture and Russian nationalism as a source for Soviet unity. Change of politics had a definite impact on the rate of articulation of Belarusianness, while russification and bilingualism influenced the cultural status and image of Belarusianness. At the same time, they by no means abolished the result of the prior epoch, i.e. the formation of the Belarusian nation.

All the leaders of the pre-Soviet nationalism in Belarus were exterminated. The subsequent Great Terror of the 1930s had a catastrophic impact on Belarusian culture. Zaprudnik describes the extent of the devastation by giving a picture of the losses suffered by literature: "In 1937 after 128 writers had been arrested, only one literature organization remained: the Writers' Union of Belarus, with 39 members, only 14 of whom wrote in Belarusan."³⁰ The institute of Byelorussian Culture, later the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences lost nearly "ninety percent of its members; the vast majority of them were shot."³¹ At the same time the specific mode of nation building had its continuation. In this respect, the position of Belarussians as Belarusians in the Soviet state was different from those living in Poland. Unlike the Poles, Vakar writes, "the Soviets had been up against men, and not against symbols of Belorussianism."³² "Stalinization of nationalism," in Vakar's words, meant that "the national framework of the

27 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 219.

28 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 77.

29 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 267.

30 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 87.

31 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History* 87.

32 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 150.

Republic had been wisely left intact. [...] It had only to be furnished with new personnel, and Belorussian life and culture oriented in a new direction. The direction was given by Stalin's own words: 'Nationalist in form, Socialist in content'."³³

At the same time, the "nationalist form" of the state in itself had considerable effect on creating the national imaginary. The Soviet state, which was undergoing the process of intense modernization, fostered new means in creation of its nations' visibility. The procedural landscape of the modern nation-state contributed to the creation of the "scientific construct" of the nations in addition to the institutional and cultural ones. These constructs, in Jim Mac Laughlin's words, being a product of census collection, cartography, land surveying, and so on were mapping the nations in both literal and metaphorical senses. The Soviet state via the structure of national republics equipped nations-subjects with the means whereby they could "imagine" their nations.

Certainly, it was not the nation imagined by Belarusian nationalists before the revolution, nor was it the nation whose building was initiated in the first years of the Soviet rule. Nevertheless, the entire period of the Soviet rule can be considered to be a specific process of designing of a Belarusian nation that was incorporated into the ideological framework of the Soviet regime. A rare case of recognition of nation-building accomplishments within the Soviet Union by a Belarusian author from opposition circles is Valer Bulgakau. He admits a positive impact of Soviet national infrastructure on future nationalists, though, he does not consider the Soviet period as the period of the Belarusian nation-building. In his view, the Soviet national policy had created a milieu that contributed to a rise of nationalist intentions. Due to this, during Gorbachev's policy of perestroika, "categories of nationality and national republics as ethnic motherland were successfully politicized by the revived national movements. It was no longer difficult to consider Belarus as a national state."³⁴

Meanwhile, Belarusian nation was affected by the developments that Belarusians experienced within the Soviet Union: the communist genocide of the 1930s, participation in the common victory in World War II, the years of post-war reconstruction realized by joint efforts and resources of different Soviet Republics.

Belarusians were severely affected by World War II. During the war, one quarter of the entire population of Belarus perished. Out of 270 towns

³³ Vakar, *Belorussia*, 146.

³⁴ V. Bulgakau, *Gistoria belaruskaga natsiianalizmu* (Vilnius: Instytut Belarusistyki), 314.

and regional centers, 209 were destroyed, including the capital city Minsk. When the Soviet Army liberated Minsk in 1943, 95 percent of the city lay in ruins. David Marples believes that the “golden age” (i.e., the key point in history perceived by most Belarusians as having major symbolic, positive value) is connected to the post-war reconstruction period. The Republic then not only restored its losses, but occupied the leading place among other Soviet Union republics as to the level of its industrial development and to the standard of population’s living. This was the period of Piotr Masherau’s government (1965–80) who became for Belarusians personally linked to those “successes.” At the same time, Masherau was reputed for his lack of corruption and closeness to the people. Some historians depicted Masherau as a person opposed to the center, who defended the interests of Belarus in Moscow.³⁵ Others presented him as a true Bolshevik who resisted the distortion of Leninist principles that had appeared in the practice of the Soviet regime.³⁶ This kind of rhetoric implied that Belarus had achieved its success in the restoration and development of its economy not due to unorthodox experiments but due to its leader’s faithfulness to Leninist principles. A “positive character” of the Soviet time, such as Masherau, enhanced the positive status of the Soviet experience in general. As Marples observes, “The supporters of an independent state or those seeking to promote state-building processes have always had to deal with Masherau factor, an era that is often regarded as a kind of ‘golden age’ of economic and cultural development [...] And the myth of Masherau, [...] like the partly mythical exploits of the partisans, largely defines the limitations of political change in post-Soviet republic.”³⁷

35 D. Marples refers to Slavimir Antanovich, “Piotr Masherov: riadom s Brezhnevym,” *Respublika*, September 24, 1993. D. Marples, “History and Politics in Post-Soviet Belarus: The Foundations,” in *Contemporary Belarus: Between Democracy and Dictatorship*, ed. E. A. Korosteleva, C. W. Lawson, and R. J. Marsh, (London and New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2003), 24.

36 I. Smirnov and A. Lebedev, “Vsia zizn’—sluzhenie narodu,” *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, February 13, 1988, cited in D. Marples, “History and Politics in Post-Soviet Belarus: The Foundations,” 24.

37 Marples, “History and Politics in Post-Soviet Belarus,” 24, 25.

Post-Soviet Conditions for Independence

Jan Zaprudnik in his 1993 book *Belarus at a Crossroads in History* referred to Belarus's first years of independence as "a laboratory of changes."¹ At the time when the book was written the country was on the threshold of its first presidential elections, whose results would determine the general line of development for the independent state.

The very fact that such a book appeared at all is noteworthy. Written in an encyclopedia format, it depicts the beginning of a new epoch in the life of Belarusians. The Supreme Soviet of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic adopted the declaration on the state sovereignty in June 1990, which formally endowed the status of independent statehood to the Belarusian people. Jan Zaprudnik's *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, symbolically, has the same effect—it tells a story of the Belarusian people in which they become a separate entity and an actor in cultural, political, and ideological events and relations. The author admits that he attempts to give his own vision of Belarusian history, which is an alternative to both the Soviet view of the Belarusian past and the one accepted in the West (whose authors, according to Zaprudnik, in their majority, support the Russophile historiographic school).² The main problem of Belarusian history in both cases was the reluctance to see anything Belarusian as a self-sufficient political and cultural unit. Zaprudnik believes that Belarus was interpreted "as an 'appendix' to a larger political unit, whether to Kiyvan Rus in ancient time, Poland in the late Middle Ages, or Russia and the Soviet Union in the ensuing period."³ This "imperial" context inevitably led to disparagement of Belarusianness itself and the national aspirations of the Belarusian people. In fact this meant that Belarusian history was positioned as devoid of its own inner dynamics and its own aspirations. Zaprudnik aims at a recon-

1 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, 224.

2 Plokhy also writes that Slavic studies in the West continue to be influenced by the imperial-era view that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania belongs to Russian history. Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 88.

3 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, xiv–xv.

struction of Belarusian history from the standpoint of Belarusian logic. A newly-depicted history gives ground for the Belarusian entity and lays the foundations for a new articulation of the Belarusian idea. The Belarusian people described therein prove to be, albeit not independent, but a separate entity in history, no matter how subordinate and oppressed it was. A new standpoint in history, Zaprudnik writes, is important as part of a more general reappraisal of Belarusians by Belarusians, for "historical consciousness is a part of political awareness, in today's Belarus the past has become a potent argument in shaping programs for the future."⁴ However, it takes years, sometimes even decades, to put new collective self-consciousness into shape, while the choice of a state development strategy had to be made as early as 1994, when the first presidential elections were scheduled.

In the first three years of Belarusian independence, a paradoxical situation had taken shape. There appeared a national movement of Belarusian intelligentsia that appealed to the pre- and extra-Soviet experience of the Belarusian nation. They saw Belarusian nation as a cultural unity as opposed to the Soviet and Russian political colonization. However, as it was shown above, real "nationalization" of the Belarusian people took place under the Soviet regime and with the help of its instruments. The Belarusian nationalists of the 1990s actually appealed not to the nation's history, but to the first stages of the development of the national movement itself. Remarkably, like in the early twentieth century, when the nation-formation took place in the form of a triangle made up of national intelligentsia, the Soviet state and the Belarusian people,⁵ at this stage the process was also run by three main actors: Belarusian nationalists, who appealed to the pre-Soviet Belarusian idea; the Belarusian state that leaned in its legitimacy on the Soviet period of nation-formation; and the Belarusian people who have been formed in the years of Soviet power and supported by its institutions. (In N. Vakar's words, "Belorussianism has been for years identified with the Soviet authority, and [...] it seems that it has become to the natives just another aspect of Communism.")⁶

During the first years of independence, the national intelligentsia faced an extremely difficult task of conducting a complicated "surgical" operation of separation of the Belarusianness and Soviet ideology, meaning a

4 Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a Crossroads in History*, xv.

5 Mark Beissinger writes that nationalist intellectuals are usually "opposed to what are arguably the two most important dramatic personae in any nationalist politics: state and society." Mark Beissinger, "How Nationalisms Spread: Eastern Europe Adrift the Tides and Cycles of Nationalist Contention," *Social Research* 59, no. 1 (1996): 98.

6 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 219.

step-by-step deidentification of Belarusianness and Soviet mass consciousness with a simultaneous saturation by alternative content. As the experience of the Soviet nation-building revealed, a success of this kind of work is most probable when the process of installation of the new content of the national idea into mass consciousness is carried out by means of numerous articulation and institutional practices supported by the state.

However, this constructivist and institutionalist aspect in understanding of the nation and national identity was underestimated by Belarusian intelligentsia. "The new nationalists" built their project of Belarusian nation on an open confrontation with the Sovietness and with the Soviet state and expanded this project mainly in the framework of historical ethno-culturalism. Here they began to actively work at a new content of the national idea deeply rooted in the past and stipulated by history. They acted like political archeologists rediscovering and reinterpreting the communal past in order to regenerate the community.⁷ In the territory of their project of Belarusianness, nationalists "animate" the Belarusian past outside Russian influence and create an alternative national mythology, which is accumulated around the golden-age seventeenth century. A specific feature of the oppositional project of the Belarusian nation is its accent on the cultural symbolic capital of the Belarusian ethnos. Belarusian nation is presented here as a historical and cultural community in a state of oblivion and unconsciousness. The new nationalists' accent on revival implies an appeal to the restoration in its national rights of the nation that had existed in the pre-Soviet past. Though, in fact, Belarusian nation had not existed—as a community whose formation was complete—prior to the Soviet rule. Here we should stress that this statement does not imply that the Belarusian nation arose entirely owing to Bolsheviks—nation-formation is stipulated by socio-historical transformations in society and is related to economic progress, modernization, and other processes. The fact that all these transformations of Belarusian society took place in the state governed by Bolsheviks was, in a way, a fatal historical coincidence. Neither does it mean that without Bolsheviks the Belarusian nation would never have taken shape. The national movement did exist outside the Bolshevik party movement and its development would highly probably have led to mass national mobilization, which would have shaped it in a different way, under different conditions. However, these considerations refer rather to the genre of historical hypothesis.

7 Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 181.

The prepresidential period of the independent Belarusian state was characterized by a complicated configuration of socio-political and economic transformations. On the one hand, it was the time of the institutional shaping of a new state. On the other hand, the process of making a new system and reform in society was hampered by the social inertia and conservatism of the old Soviet nomenclature that had retained its commanding position. Nationalists and democratic movements were gathering momentum. At the same time, the first public discontent was growing due to the catastrophic slump in the standards of living. All these factors found their reflections in the presidential elections. It was the political outsider A. G. Lukashenka who won the election, and not V. Kebich who had real power as the then prime minister and who represented the old system of power. This testifies to the fact that Belarusians gave no credence to the old political system actor and preferred an alternative one. But this was not an ideological alternative—whether democratic or nationalist—but an institutional one.

The Election of the First Belarusian President as a Mirror of Belarusian Preferences

Quite a number of authors wrote about the sudden popularity of the new Belarusian president and his appearance on the political scene. In addition to several works devoted to A. G. Lukashenka,¹ practically every text analyzing Belarus contains a special chapter describing the phenomenon of a political outsider's victory and the ensuing transformation of his government into an authoritarian regime. Some authors believe that Lukashenka put forward such a paradigm of power that answered the expectations of the Belarusian majority. It was expressed either in the rational conformity with the proposed scenario of the state existence, or in the acceptance—not always conscious—of the models of interrelationships between individuals and the power that are determined by definite archetypes of social behavior. During the campaign, the candidate for presidency outlined the claims that eloquently depicted the perspective of the state development in case he was elected. In the abstracts to his platform “To lead the people off the precipice,”² he designated a project of “the author's government”—a prototype of the future Belarusian authoritarianism, stressing the necessity of “the direct management of state enterprises, appointment of their managers.”³ It hyperbolized the sense of uncertainty in the future that had appeared in Belarusian society at the start of the economic decline caused by a sudden break of the established economic relations after the disintegration of the USSR. Lukashenka promised to return fixed prices and to

- 1 Some examples of such publications: Rainer Lindner, “The Lukashenka Phenomenon,” in *Independent Belarus: Domestic Determinations, Regional Dynamics, and Implications for the West*, ed. Margarita M. Balmaceda, James I. Clem, and Lisbeth L. Tarlow (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 77–108; Stephen White and Elena Korosteleva, “Lukashenko and the Postcommunist Presidency,” in *Postcommunist Belarus*, ed. S. White, E. Korosteleva, and J. Löwenhardt (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 17–34; Margery MacMahon, “Alexander Lukashenko, President, Republic of Belarus,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 13, no. 4 (December 1997).
- 2 “The precipice” was intended to mean the state of economy and society after the collapse of the USSR.
- 3 V. M. Shlyndikov, ed., *Sbornik alternativnykh program razvitiia Belarusi* (Minsk, 2001), <http://www.ucpb.org/index.php?page=lib&open=122>.

regulate the work of industries that were standing idle. The platform spoke of the popular nature of the president's policy who had to act in accordance with the will of the masses. Such formulations, as Belarusian political scientist Lyakhovich puts it, "served to authorize the head of the state's actions without taking into account legal or institutional restrictions."⁴ Lyakhovich believes that in this project of strengthening the state, there was a foundation ensuing deformations in the system of separation of powers in the country. "Concentration of property and levers of influence in the real sector of economy in the state's hands has turned into the pivotal mechanism of intensification of the role of the head of the executive power—President."⁵ Lukashenka's promises for a strong leader was popular in Belarus in the early 1990s—the time of social and economic disorder. In 1992 the number of those who sought a strong leader reached 76 percent, it fell to 57 percent in 1994.⁶

An important factor that gave rise to the sudden popularity of Lukashenka was his anti-corruption raid at the beginning of 1994. Opinion polls showed that in people's mind bureaucracy and corruption were the worst traits of the communist rule in Belarus.⁷ Lukashenka modeled his political image on the crest of this wave of discontent, thus emphasizing his uninvolved involvement in the communist establishment, his "closeness to the people." As K. Michalisko writes, "Lukashenka's talent for striking all the right populist chords and drawing attention to himself became evident when he turned his position as state corruption 'watchdog' against the Kebich government [...] and announced his entry into the race with a spectacular televised denunciation of corruption at the highest levels of defense, foreign affairs and other ministers, citing specific names."⁸ Remarkably corruption charges against the country's high officials did not lead to any real investi-

4 A. Lyakhovich, "Obzor proektov i idei reformirovania politicheskoi sistemy Belarusi" in *Belarus', Scenarii reform*, ed. R. Vaienia, E. Kruglikova, J. Plaskonka, and U. Ramanau (Warsaw: Bathory Foundation 2003), 14.

5 Lyakhovich, "Obzor proektov i idei," 14.

6 New Democracy Barometer 1991–2000, numbers based on Christian W. Haerpher, "Electoral Politics Compared," in *Contemporary Belarus. Between Democracy and Dictatorship*, ed. E. A. Korosteleva, C. W. Lawson, and R. J. Marsh (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 90–91.

7 National representative survey conducted by Novak in April 2000 and by Russian Research in January 2004, cited in White and McAllister, "Patterns of Political Culture," 19.

8 Kathleen J. Michalisko, "Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism," in *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova*, ed. K. Dawisha and B. Parrott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 253.

gation. The image of Lukashenka-anticorruptionist was entirely a phantom of the media, a product of “the new time” born by the symbiosis of glasnost (Lukashenka’s reading his anticorruption report in the parliament was televised nationwide) and the period of political mobilization and awakened interest toward political development in the era of radical changes in society. In due time corruption faded into the background in the political make-up of the president, however, it played a significant part in the building of the would-be president’s image on the political scene of Belarus.

Numerous authors explain Lukashenka’s popularity by his belonging to a special class of leaders, the type that by means of rhetoric, manners, and behavior, appeal to the modes of behavior typical for the peasant ethos. Rainer Lindner writes: “When he designates himself as ‘father’ (batska) [...] we note the presence of the family unit of the Russian village [...] He, a president of Belarus, does not beg for money in the West, but, instead, takes care of the matter at hand.”⁹ For Lindner the Belarusian style of life is in principle no different from the Russian one. For the Polish sociologist Ryszard Radzik the status of the Belarusian president is predetermined by a paternalistic idea of the state: “Belarusians treat their economy as a collective father, an institution that does not deserve the citizens’ support whenever it does not fulfill its parental duties. The president-leader personifies such a state, he will only deserve public acknowledgement if he behaves as a leader, and not as a common person who occupies a high office.”¹⁰

The fact that in his early career the Belarusian president was a manager of a farm just emphasizes his manner of managing the country. David Marples noticed that “Lukashenka ran the country like his former state farm, cajoling and persuading the peasantry to adopt his policies, alternately issuing threats and expressions of frustration at those who stood in his path.”¹¹ Viktor Chernov, a Belarusian political scientist, describes the “basis” of the Belarusian regime in similar terms: “The social roots of Lukashenka’s regime go back to the stratum of the kolkhoz-sovkhoz-like peasantry, to the masses of new town dwellers (in fact of peasant origin,

9 Rainer Lindner, “The Lukashenka Phenomenon,” in *Independent Belarus: Domestic Determinations, Regional Dynamics, and Implications for the West*, ed. Margarita M. Bal-maceda, James I. Clem, and Lisbeth L. Tarlow (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 98.

10 Ryszard Radzik, “Belarus’ i Siarednie-Uskhodniaia Europa,” in *Byts’ (albo nia byts’) Siarednieuropeicam, Suchasnaie polskaie mys’lennie*, translated by V. Bulgakau, 2007, Belarusian Internet Library Kamunikat, http://kamunikat.org/k_pieraklady.html?pub_start=90&pubid=2352.

11 David R. Marples, *Belarus. A Denationalized Nation* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1999), 86.

too, they inherited numerous features of the patriarchal and traditionalist consciousness). This archaic conservatism and mythologism of mentality, a low level of material needs, envy for other people's prosperity, fear of freedom and competition, the psychology of a 'besieged castle,' devotion to paternalistic values, striving for one-man management, misunderstanding the role of representative institutions, disposition to lean on an authoritative charismatic ruler, loyalty to any centre of real power."¹²

The leitmotif of the social behavior based on the archetypes of the rural style of life is disguised in Belarus by the number of the rural versus urban population percentage ratio. According to the statistics, 65 percent of the Belarusian population reside in towns. However, as a result of the large-scale speedy relocation of the rural population into towns within the Soviet urbanization project, it was not the rural population who had copied the urban style of thinking and behavior as it had occurred during the centuries' long process of urbanization in Western Europe. In the postwar Belarus, on the contrary, "the archaic rural culture came to dominate the entire urban milieu."¹³ At the same time, such Soviet elements of the urban surroundings as "lack of a recognized housing market, a rampant standardization of residential blocks, a restrictive policy of urban residence permit [the so-called *propiska*] and a lack of self-governance"¹⁴ resulted in the mechanism of total socio-cultural control embedded in the life of Belarusian town dwellers. The idea of such control is not just accountability of all spheres of life to authorities, it also implies delegating the responsibility for the solution of arising social problems, leading to the need for a strong leader.

There are other points of view concerning the phenomenon of Lukashenka's coming to power. Thus Silitski believes that Lukashenka was brought to power not so much by a real support of the people, but by the general layout of political forces in the country. On the eve of the presidential election "a growing confrontation between an increasingly hard-line government and a radical opposition took place in an increasingly apathetic society."¹⁵ It is exactly this political position of the future president—

12 Viktor Chernov, "Avtoritarnyi rezhim w Belarusi: Kharakter, zapas prochnosti, varyanty tranformatsii," *Adkrytae gramadstva* 4 (1998), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/106/2.html>.

13 Grigory Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56 no. 1 (January 2004): 107.

14 Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape," 107.

15 Vital Silitski, "Explaining Post-communist Authoritarianism in Belarus," in *Contemporary Belarus. Between Democracy and Dictatorship*, ed. Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson and Rosalind J. Marsh (London and New York: RoutledgeGurzon, 2003), 40.

lack of radical reformist intentions and keeping away from the hardliners of the ruling nomenclature— that enabled him to fill the vacuum. The errors of the ruling nomenclature and political miscalculations of the opposition “prepared the ground for the advancement of a populist outsider, a role played by Lukashenka.”¹⁶ That is why, the traditional interpretation of the phenomenon of Lukashenka’s victory due to pro-communist and anti-reformist state of opinion among the Belarusian majority, in Silitski’s view, is not quite correct. “The key to winning the presidential election was to capture the average voter, not mobilized by existing political forces [...] Lukashenka managed to present himself as an alternative to the government and the opposition, thus absorbing the support of uncommitted voters.”¹⁷

The Belarusian political scientist Lyakhovich is even more determined in his approach to Lukashenka’s phenomenon. He considers “the project of President Lukashenka” to be developed in certain spheres of Belarusian politics, which represent the interests of the so-called economic establishment. “The Belarusian economic elite needed ‘a strong person’ able to establish order even if it meant going back to former methods of governing the economy, to whom directors of state-run enterprises might be accountable.”¹⁸ As to the reasons why Kebich did not suit this political interest group, Lyakhovich mentions the enhancement of the independent working movement, the growing popularity of the democratic counterelite which was perceived by the nomenclature as a threat, and the desire to exert state control over the market. Lyakhovich goes on to say, “They needed not the first person among the equal, like V. Kebich, but someone who could be an authoritative leader for them, a charismatic politician whose popularity in society could be their guarantee of stability. They wanted stability in order to use the advantages of their status obtained in the process of re-distribution of the state property.”¹⁹ Representatives of this interest group were dispersed among the bodies of central power, among directors of major enterprises, and had support of the KGB leadership. They were also among Kebich’s proxies, which considerably weakened his campaign.

16 Silitski, “Explaining Post-communist Authoritarianism in Belarus,” 40.

17 Silitski, “Explaining Post-communist Authoritarianism in Belarus,” 42, 43.

18 Andrei Lyakhovich, “Uviadzennie pasady prezydenta Belarusi: peradumovy i nastupstvy,” in *Belaruskaja palitychnaia systema i prezydentskia vybary 2001*, ed. V. Bulgakau (Minsk–Warsaw: Anaytical Group, IDEE, 2001), Belarusian Internet Library Kamunikat, <http://kamunikat.org/knihi.html?pubid=1811>.

19 Lyakhovich, “Uviadzennie pasady prezydenta Belarusi: peradumovy i nastupstvy,” <http://kamunikat.org/knihi.html?pubid=1811>.

It is essential that during that entire election campaign the candidates for presidency had comparable opportunities for electioneering, equal access to mass media while the so-called “administrative resource” was never used. This term was later applied to describe the overt pressure on the voter in order to obtain the desired result during the voting procedure. In the 1994 election, the voters’ choice was not doubted. If we use Dawisha’s reasoning that “democratization is said to begin when the first set of free and fair elections for national level office take place,”²⁰ then the first presidential election in Belarus irrespective of the fact that it resulted in authoritarian regime, signified an introduction of democratization in the new history of Belarus.

However, the continuation of the “democratization according to the rules” in Belarus was not to be seen. The first election “must be accompanied in short terms by the granting of civil liberties and political rights and the establishment of both state institutions that operate according to the rule of law and intermediate organizations that mediate between the citizen and the state.”²¹ In addition to such institutional conditions required for the democratic development, there is a need for “social capital” as a condition for the successful transfer of the Western liberal democratic experience to the “eastern” ground. As the Polish political scientist E. Wnuk-Lipiński writes, “Liberal democracy does not come down only to procedures of electing political authorities, but it also means a certain complex of values, which embrace the status of an individual and a group, the accepted rule of the game and a legitimate set of goals that can be pursued by different individuals in public life.”²² Lack of this social capital was soon manifested in Belarus, when the formal signs of democratization acquired a “special” configuration. In Kathleen Michalisko’s words, with “catastrophic irony Belarus’s initial opening to Western reforms has been canceled indefinitely by its first democratically elected president in history.”²³ The development of the democratization of the country was stopped, the reform discontinued. The new power paradoxically displayed itself as “revolutionary government seeking retrogressive solutions to Belarusian problems.”²⁴

20 Karen Dawisha, “Democratization and Political Participation: Research Concepts and Methodologies,” in *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*, ed. K. Dawisha and B. Parrot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42.

21 Dawisha, “Democratization and Political Participation,” 42.

22 E. Wnuk-Lipiński, *Świat Międzyepoki* (Cracow: Znak, 2004), 132.

23 Michalisko, “Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism,” 223–24.

24 Marples, *Belarus. A Denationalized Nation*, 86.

The first presidential election had a considerable impact on Belarusians' consciousness and their idea of how democratic mechanism works in their country. Moreover, it made them confident that they can change the situation in the country by means of voting and elections. As the comparative research of Stephen White and Jan McAllister showed, "Belarusians were more convinced of the effectiveness of the electoral mechanism than either their Ukrainian or Russian counterparts [...] The majority of Belarusian respondents thought elections gave them some influence over government but only a minority did so in Russia and Ukraine."²⁵ When asked, "Do you think taking part in national elections gives people like you an opportunity to influence the government of the country or not?" 51 percent of Belarusians gave a positive answer, while in Ukraine 40 percent gave a similar answer, and only 29 percent in Russia.²⁶ Similarly, a majority of Belarusian respondents thought elections could change their country's future direction, Ukrainians and Russians were much more doubtful: 64 percent of Belarusians thought elections gave them some influence over their government, while in Ukraine and Russia the corresponding numbers were 53 percent and 42 percent.²⁷ Indeed, Belarus is one of the few post-Soviet countries that had changed its leadership and the strategy of political development through the voting. This fact also offers some basis for the official discourse to actively use the disguise of democracy in the current political system: it has presumably appeared as a result of people's will. This, together with the formal conservation of certain aspects of a democratic system, makes it possible to characterize the Belarusian regime as "elected dictatorship."²⁸ Each post-Soviet republic "has brought forth leaders (mostly presidents) with regionally determined patterns of political behavior: the Russian head of state has taken up the heritage of imperial claims with the war in Chechnya, leaders of the traditional societies in Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan have remained autocratic clan politicians, and the Baltic states have continued to rely on links to Western Europe. Lukashenka, in turn, attained a type of power that embodies the essence of the Belarusian state—a power based on a subjugated elite but that nevertheless results in minimal state sovereignty."²⁹

25 Stephen White and Jan McAllister, "Patterns of Political Culture," 26. Authors refer to the results of the national representative survey conducted for the authors and associates by Novak in April 2000 and by Russian research in January 2004.

26 White and McAllister, "Patterns of Political Culture," 26.

27 White and McAllister, "Patterns of Political Culture," 26.

28 Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson, and Rosalind J. Marsh, "Introduction. Paradoxes of Democratisation," 15.

29 R. Lindner, "The Lukashenka Phenomenon," 78.

“Labels” of the Belarusian Regime

Attempts at categorizing the developments in post-communist Belarus are made continually. As a result there have appeared a number of labeling categories by means of which their authors try to find adequate criteria for the assessment of the political situation in Belarus. Elena Korosteleva writes that the Belarusian system with its de facto individual presidential rule and the circumstances where all the official political institutions in society are directly or indirectly dependent on the president can be characterized as “superpresidentialism.”¹ S. Shushkevich diagnoses the Belarusian regime as neocommunist.² According to Shushkevich, renunciation of private property, emphasis on social equality, denial of personal freedom, militant atheism, and repudiation of Western values are the basic principles of the Belarusian regime’s ideology that relate it to communism. They are still preserved in “Belarusian minds,” because they had not been opportunely unmasked following the break-up of the USSR. “In comparison with the classical totalitarian states, the totalitarianism in Belarus is rather restricted,”³ as “the Belarusian authoritarian regime tolerates elements of civil society,”⁴ albeit with limitations that significantly diminish their efficacy.

Eke and Kuzio define the Belarusian regime as “sultanism.” It is characterized by utmost patrimonialism, lack of a borderline between the private and the personal spheres, insufficiency of articulated ideology, authoritarianism without outside rules, disapproval of political pluralism, and a violent overthrow of the regime as the only way to end it.⁵ The sultanism phenomenon, according to these authors, has a pronounced oriental accent. However, the Belarusian regime, as compared to similar regimes in the for-

1 Stephen White and Elena Korosteleva, “Lukashenko and the Postcommunist Presidency,” in *Postcommunist Belarus*, ed. S. White, E. Korosteleva, and J. Löwenhardt (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 64.

2 Stanislav Shushkevich, *Neokommunism v Belarusi* (Smolensk: Skif, 2002).

3 Shushkevich, *Neokommunism v Belarusi*, 113.

4 Shushkevich, *Neokommunism v Belarusi*, 132.

5 Steven Eke and Taras Kuzio, “Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52 no. 3 (2000): 536.

mer Central Asian republics, is obviously more liberal and presupposes definite liberties (for instance, the right to leave the country for a Belarusian is not restricted by the state). As to the idea of a violent overthrow, Ioffe was right to note that it is highly unlikely “that Lukashenka may end his tenure as a president only if violently overthrown. In the absence of any indications that the 2001 presidential election was falsified to the point of changing the winner, any assumption is simply too far-fetched.”⁶ The same can be said about the 2006 presidential election. According to the results of opinion polls carried out by the IISEPS, during the 2006 presidential elections 63 percent of the voters voted for the current president (83 percent according to the data of the Central Election Committee). That is, the actual popularity of the Belarusian leader does not permit us to speak of him maintaining his authority by means of overt violence.

Some researchers conceptualize Lukashenka’s political regime by the play of words his own name—“lukashenkism.”⁷ The typical features of lukashenkism are “an authoritarian style of leadership, with a growing reliance on the police and special forces, censorship and tight control of the media;” “a discernible contempt and disregard for democratic institutions and procedures;” “an aversion to and avoidance of vital economic reform with an expressed preference for the state-led policies of the Soviet era;” “an active policy of reuniting Belarus with Russia.”⁸ Zviglyanich describes lukashenkism as “a symbiosis of communism, chauvinism and populism in the Latin American style.”⁹ He defines Lukashenka’s political paradigm as “a distinctive world of postcommunist autarchy and retros-
strategy, where, though there is no official dominant communist ideology as there was in the Soviet Union, communist practices in politics, economics and management have nevertheless been preserved and modified in their entirety.”¹⁰ Contrary to Shushkevich, Zviglyanich does not see the communist ideology as inserted into the new political reality that is being built by Lukashenka and his supporters. One can speak of preserving not so much of ideology itself but of its practices, in particular the practice of rela-

6 Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape,” 99.

7 Margery MacMahon, “Alexander Lukashenko, President, Republic of Belarus,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 13, no. 4 (December 1997): 129–36.

8 MacMahon, “Alexander Lukashenko,” 129.

9 Vl. Zviglyanich, “The Lost World: Belarus as a Model of Political Necromancy,” *Prism* 5, no. 10 (May 1999), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=6883&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=221](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=6883&tx_ttnews[backPid]=221).

10 Zviglyanich, “The Lost World.”

tionships among the state, society, and individual. In other words, the ideology failed, but the social system constructed on its basis can survive. Zviglyanich defines the political outlook of Lukashenka as "retro-utopian:" "retro-utopia focuses attention on the purity and greatness of the past. In the retro-utopian world view, the past possesses an indisputable moral authority which cannot be questioned."¹¹ There is no break between the past and the present in the perspective of Belarusian ideology, some fragments of the present Belarusian political life are often artificially embedded into the perspective of social history, thus emphasizing the continual character of modern Belarusian policy and ideology. For example, there are pioneer organizations for children in schools, there is a state patriotic organization for youth. In 2005, the eighty-fifth anniversary of the Belarusian Komsomol (Youth Communist League) was actively commemorated throughout the country, though such a League does not exist in modern Belarus. It has been replaced by the BRSM (Beloruskii Respublikanskii Soiuz Molodiozhi; The Belarusian National Youth League), a supposed successor to Komsomol, its ideological "alter ego."

Here lies one of the important distinctions of Lukashenka's political ideology as compared to other post-soviet leaders. As Zviglyanich writes, "For all their differences, the theories of 'transition' from socialism to capitalism in Russia and Ukraine have (at least so far) one common feature—denunciation of the past as a totalitarian, administrative socialism to which there can be no return. For now, the better state of affairs is associated with the market economy and the 'reforms'."¹² The Belarusian picture of the world displays quite a different moral status as well as the economic potential of the old system. "By stressing the moral greatness of the past and the possibility of finding prescriptions for salvation there, Lukashenka is [...] showing that the possibilities of the Soviet economic system have not been completely exhausted."¹³ Such an ideological tinge of the past determines a special strategy of the future, which is viewed not as a reform, transformation, or "transition" to a different social system, but as a renovation of the old one. Actually, there can be no reversion to the old system, and this is realized, among others, by the architects of the Belarusian retro-utopia. However, the topic of the positive nature of the past practices makes it possible to exploit the nostalgic notes of social consciousness of part of the population. Rouda describes the phenomenon of Lukashenka's acquisition

11 Zviglyanich, "The Lost World."

12 Zviglyanich, "The Lost World."

13 Zviglyanich, "The Lost World."

of power in 1994 as a victory of Belarusian “nostalgic populism” in Belarus instead of democratic populism, which was predominant in the majority of East European countries at the beginning of the 1990s.¹⁴

Since his coming to power, oppositional politicians and researchers of Belarusian transformations considered the appearance of Lukashenka on the political scene as a direct consequence of Russian interests in him. Reflecting this stand Jan Zaprudnik writes: “Since national identity has been gaining ground in Belarus, the only way to maintain its dominion over the ‘western gate’ country is through suppression of its identity in the hands of an autocratic regime.”¹⁵ Lukashenka’s image as a Russian protégé enables to explain the anti-national measures that were taken during his rule—the return to two state languages, the replacement of the historical national symbols by neo-Soviet ones, and, finally, the design of integration with Russia. Remarkably, the idea that precisely Russia is the “author” of the Belarusian political anomaly in the shape of totalitarian regime on the border with the united Europe is quite popular not just in Western research, but also among Belarusian opposition politicians as well as among Russian. The degree assigned to Russia’s impact on the political climate of Belarus varies. Its range extends from a perception of Lukashenka as Russia’s protégé—“we are dealing with an inside occupation conducted by Russian secret services through Lukashenka’s regime,”¹⁶ to the image of Lukashenka as “Putin’s home-made dictator,”¹⁷ to a more moderate view of Russia’s support of the Belarusian regime as forced by the geopolitical conditions.¹⁸

Although this approach to Russia–Lukashenka dealings is indeed popular among opposition in Belarus, the course of events in Belarus–Russia relationships points to Lukashenka as an “independent” player if not economically, but at least politically. This stand is implied by the very logic of

14 Uladzimir Rouda, “Natsional’naia ideia kak faktor stanovlenia grazhdanskogo obshchestva,” *Analitika, Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr NGO* (2004), http://iac.unibel.by/anl_na0040.htm.

15 Jan Zaprudnik, “Belarus: in Search of National Identity Between 1986 and 2000,” in *Contemporary Belarus. Between Democracy and Dictatorship*, edited by Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson, and Rosalind J. Marsh (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 123.

16 Zianon Pazniak, “Nezalezhnasts’ geta iosts’ isnavan’ne natsyi,” BPF, <http://www.pbpf.org>.

17 Uladzimir Rouda, “Zachem nuzhen Putinu ‘domashnii dictator’?” *Belorusy i Rynok*, May 3, 2006, <http://www.br.minsk.by/index.php?article=27413>.

18 Leonid Radzihovski, “Vechnaia igra,” *Vzgliad*, January 25, 2006, <http://vzglyad.ru/columns/2006/1/25/19927.html>.

an authoritarian regime, which is not possible without sovereignty and because of this, "the presidents will safeguard the independence of Belarus and Russia."¹⁹

One of the effects of Lukashenka's rule has become social de-mobilization in the country, mass departure of Belarusians from the public sphere of real politics. Indeed, political life, having just become part of the range of Belarusian society's interests, was profaned again as a result of Lukashenka's regime. Behind the façade of people democracy, old monopoly power scenario, too familiar to those inhabiting the post-Soviet space, remains in place.

19 Yuri Drakokhrust and Dmitri Furman, "Belarus and Russia: the game of virtual integration," in *Independent Belarus*, ed. M. Balmaceda, J. Clem, L. Tarlow, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 254.

“Triple Transformation” and Belarus

The most popular way to form an opinion of a country's transition is to evaluate the state of three critically important processes that provide advancement of a new epoch in the life of society. The “triple transition”¹ scheme that acquired classical status in political science includes democratization of the political system, marketization of the economy, and establishment of a civil society. However, the transition theory “suggest[s] a clear endpoint of political development, for example a pluralist and liberal democracy [...] [T]he process of change, for theoreticians of transition, is a clear track from point A to point B; and transition theory involves defining the goal of change and deciding when this goal has been reached and transition completed.”² The majority of Central and East European countries have adopted the direction of purposeful transformation, that is, all reforms had clear-cut guidelines. But even in these countries, the “transition” had often taken a complicated path, and some researchers carefully avoided a simplistic interpretation of changes as a straight transfer from point A to point B. When analyzing the Belarusian post-communist experience, rejection of using the concept of the “goal” of transition is caused not so much by a methodological necessity as by its absolute absence. By the mid-1990s it was clear that the Belarusian post-communist experience had become an example of a society's transformation the direction of which does not fit the scheme of “transition.” With respect to Belarus, it is justified to apply the term “transformation approach,” a core conceptual assumption of which, according to Christian W. Haerpfer, is that it “does not postulate a ‘quasi-natural’ aim and goal of changes,” but, instead, “the outcome of political as well as economic transformations is open and not

1 Claus Offe, “Capitalism by Democratic Design? Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe,” *Social Research* 58, no. 4 (1991): 865–92.

2 Christian W. Haerpfer, *Democracy and Enlargement in Post-Communist Europe: The Democratisation of the General Public in 15 Central and Eastern European Countries, 1991–1998* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

given at the beginning or during the comparative analysis of change.”³ One can speak of the triple transformation of Belarusian society, keeping in mind that none of the spheres has an articulated endpoint.

POLITICAL SYSTEM DESIGN

The choice of the post-communist states’ political system design—be it presidential, parliamentary, or semi-presidential—was based on the experience of Western nations. As Leslie Holmes assumed, preference was given based on the choice of the “triple transition” element most favored by certain countries in their development. “Those for whom the top priority is political distancing from the communist power structure will usually tend towards a more parliamentary system. Conversely, many of those for whom the economic transition is the most important task at this stage will veer towards presidentialism, in the belief that there is presently a need for strong leadership and efficient decision-making. Those who see these first two transitions as inseparable, and who reject the notion that a choice has to be made between democracy and effective decision-making, are often attracted to the semi-presidential model.”⁴ Belarus has found itself among the countries that preferred strong leadership in the hope of seeing the implementation of a more effective mechanism of decision-making.

There are different controversial standpoints in appraising the influence of a political system on the functioning of democracy. Juan Linz writes about the advantages of the parliamentary system in a stable democratic system setup. Referring to the political practices of Europe, Latin America, and the United States, Linz proves that the parliamentary system is more often conducive to strengthening of democratic principles. In his opinion, the sole presidential democracy with a lengthy history of political succession is the United States. The majority of other countries that have a president are not purely presidential systems. At the same time, in countries with deep political divergence and a great number of political parties, parliamentarism becomes a guarantor of the preservation of democracy, although the presidential form of governance has a multitude of aspects that are bad for the prospects of democracy. Linz believes that “the system of presidential governance is doubtful because it works according to the principle ‘the winner takes all,’ which in itself makes the democratic policy

3 Christian W. Haerpfer, *Democracy and Enlargement in Post-Communist Europe*, 3.

4 Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 193.

a game with a zero result, and such games are known for the conflicts they cause."⁵ Presidential power introduces an undesirable element of distinct division and polarization into society, which requires conciliatory mechanisms. A scheduled presidential election, held apart from other elections, leads to a more rigid system in the inter-election period. Conversely, parliamentary systems permit a more frequent change of leaders.

Linz's position has been criticized a number of times. For instance, Donald L. Horowitz gives the reverse examples of how a system of parliamentary democracy has caused a rise of authoritarianism in some African states. In his opinion, "some inborn flaws of the presidential rule system (such as a rigid fixed term of office, a weak cabinet of ministers, and the possibility of the abuse of presidential power) do not always predetermine state political practice."⁶ Seymour Martin Lipset claims that the thesis of the dichotomy of two systems of power and the obvious advantages of each as compared with the other, is on the whole not correct. He points to the importance of cultural factors and historical legacy of countries, which can have a decisive influence on how a given political system functions.⁷

Analyzing the conditions of concrete post-communist countries, Joel Hellman wrote in 1998 that the parliamentary system makes a more favorable institutional milieu for democratization and market reform, while the presidential system under certain circumstances can become the most "relevant" one for implementing an antireform policy in the transition period.⁸ Ensuing developments in Belarus after 1994 have confirmed this perspective, as the president has become a stronghold of backward ideology. At the same time, it must be admitted that the experience of the parliamentary republic in Belarus between 1991 and 1993 prior to the adoption of a new constitution, completely discredited itself in the public consciousness—the parliament proved unable to solve vital problems and to avert the economic crisis.

One must also take into account that the institution of the presidency introduced in Belarus by the 1994 constitution was not designed for the extent of power concentration that the Belarusian president has acquired.

5 Juan Linz, "Opasnosti prezidentstva," *Predely vlasti*, nos. 2–3 (1994), <http://old.russ.ru/antolog/predely/2-3/dem14.htm>.

6 Donald L. Horowitz, "Razlichia demokratii," *Predely vlasti*, nos. 2–3 (1994), <http://old.russ.ru/antolog/predely/2-3/dem26.htm>.

7 Seymour Martin Lipset, "Rol' politicheskoi kultury," *Predely vlasti*, nos. 2–3 (1994), <http://old.russ.ru/antolog/predely/2-3/dem32.htm>.

8 Joel Hellman, "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Post-Communist Transition," *World Politics* 50, no. 2 (January 1998): 203–34.

The problem with the constitution was that although it did not mean to establish an individual presidential dictatorship, “it did not exclude such a possibility.”⁹ As Shushkevich said in his interview with *Adkrytaie gramadstva* magazine, the problem with the constitution was that “some essential articles of the constitution could be interpreted in one’s favor and used to gradually extend one’s power, which ultimately resulted in negative changes within the state lifestyle and the current situation.”¹⁰

While discussing the draft of the constitution that favored the introduction of a strong presidential institution in Belarus, an equally active part was taken by democratic forces and the nomenclature. The democrats assumed that “in the situation wherein the parliament lacked influential democratically oriented political parties, the only means of transition to democracy and a market economy could be the introduction of the office of president and election of a democratically minded person as president.”¹¹ Trust in the miraculous force of presidential power was a sort of “infection” on the Belarusian political scene in the early 1990s. It grew especially strong after the August 1991 putsch. The experience of Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania showed that the figure of president enabled the strengthening of the country’s independence and the ability to embark on democratic reforms more decisively. In Belarus, however, the conservative elitist nomenclature pinned their hopes on the presidential institution: they also intended to preserve their power by means of their candidate’s election. The only force opposing the introduction of the presidential institution was the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF). In 1993 the BPF leader, Pazniak, wrote: “under the social and political circumstances that exist today in Belarus, presidential power can automatically lead to the possibility of an administration and party dictatorship. Presidency in Belarus has arisen as an idea of the Communist Party apparatchiks due to the fear and hopelessness of the Party bureaucracy they experienced because of the large-scale democratic working class movement, and as the last chance for them to return and strengthen the former absolute power of the Communist Party of Belarus through the presidential form of government.”¹² BPF’s stance affected the state of public consciousness to

9 A. Lyakhovich, “Obzor proektov i idei reformirovania politicheskoi sistemy Belarusi,” 13.

10 Stanislav Shushkevich, “Interv’iu” *Adkrytaie gramadstva* no. 1(7) (2000), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/1.00/2.html>.

11 “Kakoi byt’ Belarusi: prezidentskoi ili parlamentskoi?” *Adkrytaie gramadstva* no. 1(7) (2000), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/1.00/5.html>.

12 Zianon Pazniak, “Chamu nomenklatura za prezidenta?” *Adkrytaie gramadstva* no. 1 (10) (2001), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/1.01/11.html>.

some extent. Lyakhovich cited these data: "The opinion poll, conducted in December 1993 gave the following results—49.5 percent of Belarusian voters were in favor of introducing the presidential post, while 29.3 percent were against."¹³

As the ensuing transformation of the presidential republic into an authoritarian state showed, the apprehensions of the BPF had real grounds. However, the BPF position was not supported by the majority of the parliament's members and in March 1994 a new constitution of the Republic of Belarus was adopted, which included the institution of the presidency. According to Silitski, "The introduction of a presidential republic sharply reduced the chances for a successful democratization in Belarus."¹⁴ Silitski assumed that the problem was in the Belarusian context of its introduction, although he considered the main threat to democracy to be not the Party nomenclature, but the systemic infrastructure of government that was inherited by Belarus. In other words, not individuals, but the institutional legacy carried the main danger. "The country had no strong tradition of local government and the regional authorities were politically and financially weak compared to the center; there was only one central state TV station and one publishing house where almost all central newspapers and magazines were printed. In these circumstances, only effective parliamentary control over the government could bridle the executives' efforts to concentrate power."¹⁵

* * *

The destruction of democratic principles of government such as restriction of other institutions' power and attribution of more authority to the president began with the first referendum initiated in 1995, by the results of which the president "obtained" the right to dismiss the parliament. In the 1996 referendum, new amendments proposed the introduction of a two-chamber parliament and transmission of some parliamentary authority to the president, in particular, the appointment of members to the Upper Chamber of Parliament, members of the Constitutional Court, members of the Central Election Committee and the State Control Committee. It is no accident that 1996 is sometimes called the "year of constitutional coup

13 A. Lyakhovich, "Uviadzennie pasady prezydenta Belarusi: peradumovy i nastupstvy," in *Belaruskaja palitychnaia systema i prezydentskia vybary 2001*, ed. V. Bulgakau (Minsk—Warsaw: Analytical Group, IDEE, 2001), <http://kamunikat.org/knihi.html?pubid=1811>.

14 Silitski, "Explaining Post-Communist Authoritarianism in Belarus," 41.

15 Ibid., 41–42.

d'état" in Belarus. Following the referendum, the parliament elected in 1996 was dissolved and some of its members (110) who were loyal to the president entered the "new" parliament—the National Assembly. Since that time, the Belarusian parliament ceased to be recognized by the international community. The Constitutional Court was dissolved as well. Since 1996, the heads of local executive committees at all levels have been appointed by the president. It is hard to overestimate the importance of such transformations in the political system. E. Korosteleva writes, "This phenomenon, known as the 'presidential vertical', has in essence deprived the electors of their right to decision making and control of government."¹⁶

A number of works in political science give a comparative analysis of presidential legislative power in different states as registered in national laws.¹⁷ Analyzing the possibilities provided to the president by the law of a state, one can judge his range of influence and "degree" of power. In the light of legislative properties of the institution of the presidency, the power of the Belarusian president undoubtedly looks extended. Although officially the president is not the head of executive power (in the Belarusian constitution there is no such concept), he nevertheless has real authorities of the head of government. The president is entitled not only to appoint, with the parliament's consent, the prime minister and to moderate the Council of Ministers' meetings, but also to individually determine the structure of government, to appoint and dismiss its members, and to decide to dissolve the government. In addition, the president is entitled to promulgate decrees and orders that are binding on the territory of the whole country, as well as to reject any enactments of the government. Furthermore, the president has the right to veto a law or a part of a law, to promulgate a decree (which has the force of a law as long as it remains within the framework of the constitution); and in case of any inconsistency between a decree or edict and the law, a presidential regulatory act takes precedence, with the exception of cases when the authority to promulgate a decree or edict is provided for by the law. The president does not plan the state budget, which is the parliament's responsibility, but his approval is

16 Elena Korosteleva, "The Emergence of a Party System," in *Postcommunist Belarus*, ed. S. White, E. Korosteleva, and J. Löwenhardt (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 56.

17 Mathew Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), chap. 8, 148–166; James McGregor, "The Presidency in East Central Europe," RFE/RL Research Report 3, no. 2 (January 14, 1994): 23–31; Timothy Frye, "A Politics of Institutional Choice: Post-communist Presidencies," *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no. 5 (October 1997): 523–52.

required; he has the right to convene a national referendum, though the same right is given to both chambers of the parliament and a certain number of common citizens. Finally, the president has the right to dissolve the parliament, but only if the latter twice refuses to confirm the nominated prime minister or if the Lower Chamber expresses its vote of no confidence in the government, provided that there is no state of emergency, martial law, or impeachment procedure going on in the country.

Comparing presidential authority in Belarus and some other countries, White and Korosteleva conclude that the Belarusian president is "well above, for instance, the Mexican or American president in terms of legislative powers, but below them both in terms of his extralegislative authority."¹⁸ At the same time, the authors admit that such a "mechanical" examination of presidential powers has its flaws. In particular, it cannot detect shades of the real policy of the authorities: "a president who looks powerful on paper may be 'quite weak in reality (and vice versa)'," besides, in the reality of post-communist countries "the powers of the presidency are difficult to distinguish from 'the exceptional personalities' that have held this office."¹⁹ As Lyakhovich writes, examination of Belarus's legislative instruments for regulating the legal status and determining the sphere of power of the Belarusian president gives "an impression that is quite far from the reality."²⁰ The legislative limits within which a political structure exists are prone to being eroded and "merged" with the image of a certain person. In such cases, the person in power gradually begins to replace the law.

A participant in a roundtable discussion where lawyers and political scientists debated on the topic "Power and Law in the Context of Society's Development" correctly noted: "In the West, the concepts of 'power' and 'law' are ontologically clearly separated in the consciousness of both the elite and society, while in Belarus these concepts are not separated, they are merged in the mass consciousness. With us power is law, whatever power desires, people have to fulfill."²¹ The Belarusian history of the past decade shows that the political system has transformed because a person in power

18 White and Korosteleva, "Lukashenko and the Postcommunist Presidency," 63–64.

19 White and Korosteleva, "Lukashenko and the Postcommunist Presidency," 64; see also Lee Kendal Metcalf, "Measuring Presidential Power," *Comparative Political Studies* 33, no. 5 (June 2000): 83.

20 Lyakhovich, "Uviadzennie pasady prezydenta Belarusi: peradumovy i nastupstvy," <http://kamunikat.org/knihi.html?pubid=1811>.

21 "Vlast' i pravo v kontekste obshchestvennogo razvitiya," *Adkrytaie gramadstva* no. 1(12) (2002), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/1.02/4.html>.

has created the illusion in a major part of society that, as a political figure, he is identical to power as a political institution. Later by means of numerous manipulations (amendments to the constitution, a number of decrees and orders), this identification was given a legislative basis. Power has become a synonym for law and vice versa.

Another problem in the analysis of the Belarusian presidency is so-called unregistered power—authorities that are not set by the constitution—for example, appointments to the system of legal power, including the Constitutional Court, whose function, among others, is to monitor the president's activity; or the authority of the president in making assignments to the Upper Chamber of Parliament, which is "difficult to reconcile with the principle of the separation of powers."²² And, finally, an analysis of the legitimized power of the Belarusian president leaves out the fact that in his activities he regularly breaches the limits of his legal authority.²³ Except for authorities that are legally confirmed, the work of the state system presupposes the informal switching over to the president of decisions regarding most spheres of life, which makes him the sole acting level of authority in the country. As a result, in the territory subordinate to Lukashenka's regime, "a rule of law largely ceased to operate," while the political system in the country displays "ostensibly free and regular elections, liberties that are guaranteed on paper and the nominal presence of a rule of law."²⁴

22 White and Korosteleva, "Lukashenko and the Postcommunist Presidency," 64.

23 One such violation that received great publicity is connected with the decree signed by A. Lukashenka on May 7, 2005, which ordered the main Minsk avenues named after Skaryna and Masherau to be renamed "Independence" and "Victory" avenues, respectively. According to the law (which is considered to be superior to a presidential decree) "On administrative and territorial divisions and the order of deciding matters of administrative and territorial makeup of the Republic of Belarus" signed by Lukashenka himself in May 1998, the president is not to rename streets. The sphere of his authority covers oblasts, regional and urban districts, towns of oblast jurisdiction and their districts, as well as districts of Minsk city. The renaming of avenues, streets, squares, and other constituent parts of localities is made by the respective local council of deputies, taking into account the opinion of the given territory's population. The decree caused a disturbance among the intelligentsia and opposition; there were demonstrations in Minsk but the decision remained valid. Frantsishak Skaryna symbolizes the golden age of pre-Soviet non-Russian Belarusian history, and Piotr Masherau symbolizes the Soviet epoch of Belarusian prosperity. Thus, this decision had important symbolic meaning and also set a precedent for violation of the law by a head of state, which was striking for politically conscious Belarusians.

24 White and Korosteleva, "Lukashenko and the Postcommunist Presidency," 64, 74.

ECONOMIC MARKETIZATION AND LIBERALIZATION

The economic development of Belarus looks even more ambiguous than its political development. The assessment of Belarusian economic strategy is much more contradictory than that of its political one. In a way, Belarusian experience is an attempt at economic development without significant reforms in the system inherited from the USSR. A few steps toward reforms were made in 1992–94: price liberalization was carried out; native currency was formally controlled by an independent bank that was introduced; large-scale privatization vouchers were issued. However, after 1994 all reforms were halted. In 1997, Polish sociologist Ryszard Radzik wrote about the doubtful prospects for Belarus's development "where no essential structural reforms took place. Belarusian economic system is characterized by a low privatization level, a high level of centralization and unstable legal norms, a continual decrease in investment and a liquidation of the monetary reserves of the country."²⁵ As a result, a command economy²⁶ is operating today in Belarus under a thin layer of market activity, a situation that is "similar to pre-transition Poland in the second half of the 1980s."²⁷

The official name for Belarus's economic model is a "socially oriented market economy." This model includes a series of principles based on economic and legal aspects. First, it is "an active regulating role of the state that appears in elaborating and introducing prospective programs of social and economic development, in defining priorities, and in controlling their execution."²⁸ Second, it is "an active structure of authority, essential for the efficient administration of the national economy."²⁹ Third, it is "legal and factual provision of the equality of forms of property."³⁰ (The lack of concrete privatization actions in a country that inherited an economy of total state ownership, leads to an incontestable preponderance of state property

25 Ryszard Radzik, "Belarus' i Siarednie-Ushodniaia Europa."

26 Command economy or directed economy is an economic system in which the central government makes all decisions on the production and consumption of goods and services. In such economies, central economic planning by the state or government is so extensive that it controls all major sectors of the economy and formulates all decisions about their use and about the distribution of income.

27 D. Mario Nuti, "The Belarus Economy: Suspended Animation between State and Markets," in White, Korosteleva, and Löwenhardt, *Postcommunist Belarus*, 97.

28 A. Lukashenka, "Edinenie—nash istoricheskii vybor." *Nash sovremennik* 12 (2005), http://www.soyuzinfo.ru/ru/officially/interview_earnings/index.php?from4=6&id4=85573.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

over private property.) Fourth, it is social policy, meaning “when the economy works for the development of a system of free education, medicine, maintenance of social guarantees, and payments.” Finally, it is “integration with Russia.”³¹

This “Belarusian model” seems to be something like that very “third way,” which European social democrats, or the left, have failed to discover. However, “the European third way” presupposes “the primacy of markets both domestically and globally, favors privatization of state assets and enterprises, and is committed to affordable and sustainable policies, recognizing the importance of hard budget constraints and fiscal and monetary prudence.”³² Meanwhile the Belarusian “third way” strives toward preserving state property in its old, prereform condition, slightly diluted by market elements, but in general it presupposes no real market system as it is. That is why the so-called target model of Belarusian economic development, a “socially oriented market economy,” is nothing but utopia because, as D. Mario Nuti notes, “one cannot socially orient a market economy that is not there.”³³

The state sector of the Belarusian economy by far outnumbers the private one. Investments in private sector GDP are about 20 percent, while in Russia they are 70 percent, and in Ukraine 55 percent. Foreign net income in the economy still remains the lowest among all post-Soviet economic systems. Market mechanisms have been introduced in a limited number of fields, which allows us to speak of a system of hybrid economic management—part market and part planned—with odds favoring the latter.

Since 1994, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has annually published Transition Reports with “A Transition Progress Scoreboard”³⁴ concerning the countries with which it cooperates. Soon after the first publication, Belarus firmly occupied one of the last places among transition countries on the list. This means that in terms of reforms it has not advanced more than Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, or Turkmenistan. No wonder some authors notice that in the case of the Belarusian economy one can hardly speak of the failure of economic reforms, as one can of reforms in Russia and Ukraine. Belarus, alongside Turkmenistan, is one of the countries “where economic transition has not really been tried,

31 Ibid.

32 D. M. Nuti, “The Belarusian Alternative: Transition or Solely Reform,” *Belarus Economic Trends Quarterly Report* 2 (April–June 1999): 14–20.

33 Nuti, “The Belarus Economy,” 101.

34 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Transition Report* (London, 2003).

so it is wrong to speak of failure."³⁵ Mario Nuti also places Belarus in the category of "non starters" suggesting that the process of transition has not begun.³⁶

Virtually, Belarus has a command economic system, with large state enterprises dominating, state control over the prices in both the state and the private sectors, the Central Bank subordinate to the authorities, large-scale subsidies, and latent inflation. According to the index of economic freedom, in 2009 Belarus ranks 167th out of 179 countries, which characterizes it as a "repressive" economy.³⁷

Still, some researchers indicate that the absence of market reforms in Belarus does not mean its economy has ceased operations. Grigory Ioffe remarks, "The economic situation in Belarus is far from serene [...] and writers who cast Belarus as inherently backward, wretched and dependent [...] have not done their homework on Belarus."³⁸ Ioffe cites comparative figures of economic development in Belarus since 1994, which show that among the countries of the CIS "Belarus's economic standing appears to be favorable." It produces 70 percent of buses, 60 percent of tractors, 50 percent of television sets, and 25 percent of the footwear in the entire CIS.³⁹ "Belarus is also ahead of Russia and Ukraine in agricultural output: in Belarus it declined by 32%, whereas in Russia and Ukraine it fell by 40 and 43% respectively."⁴⁰

The index of economic restoration also proves the absence of any recession in the economy: by 2002 Belarus had restored 93 percent of GDP as compared to 1989, ranking second after Uzbekistan (e.g., Russia's index is 71 percent).⁴¹ The unemployment rate in the country remains at 2 to 3 percent. According to annual UN Human Development reports and the Human

35 Colin W. Lawson, "Path-Dependence and the Economy of Belarus," in Korosteleva, Lawson, and Marsh, *Contemporary Belarus*, 125.

36 Mario D. Nuti, "Suspended Animation Instead of Transition," paper presented at the ESRC workshop "One Europe or Several;" "The Outsiders: Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine between Russia and Europe," London School of Economics, December 15 (2000). Quoted in Andrew Wilson and Clelia Rontoyanni, "Security or Prosperity? Belarusian and Ukrainian Choices," in Wallander and Legvold, *Swords and Sustenance*, 44.

37 "Ranking the Countries, 2009", Index of Economic Freedom, Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/index/Rankings.aspx>.

38 Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape," 90.

39 Ibid., 91. The author refers to "Osnovnye pokazateli po gosudarstvam sodruzhestva v 1999" (Moscow: Statkomitet, 2000), 135–38.

40 Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape," 91.

41 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Transition Report* (London, 2003).

Development Index,⁴² Belarus constantly stays far ahead of all other CIS countries and some East European countries.⁴³

The majority of experts on Belarus agree that the main source of economic solvency has to be sought in Russian support. Russia helps to sustain the Belarusian economy in diverse ways. Ravi Abdelal refers to “debt pardoning and rescheduling;” “loopholes in customs union,” “favorable barter terms, and heavily subsidized energy exports, particularly gas.”⁴⁴ No wonder there is one principle among the basics of the “Belarusian model” of economic development—“close cooperation, overall integration with Russia (a common trade and economic area, manufacturing cooperation, formation of an energy balance, mutually beneficial trade in resources, goods, and services).”⁴⁵

The fact that the Belarusian economy is an “open” model is at variance with its economic image as a backward country undergoing constant crisis. In actuality, foreign commerce is rapidly developing in Belarus at a pace that no other CIS countries can boast. Export trade makes up more than half of its GDP.⁴⁶ This openness of the Belarusian economy is nothing but a paradox for all economy analysts, since it is traditionally accepted that the degree of openness is usually high in economically developed countries of medium size, and Belarus seems to fit these criteria.⁴⁷ However, this openness of economy, which means the dependence of economic growth on external factors, not only creates unlimited scope for further development but also makes it vulnerable. Economists have long known the risks borne by an economy oriented on foreign commerce. First, it leads to specialization of the country’s economy, followed by its dependence on foreign

42 The Human Development Index (HDI) is characterized as a “broadened prism for viewing human progress and the complex relationship between income and well-being,” <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2003>.

43 For example, in 2003 Belarus ranked fifty-third while Russia was fifty-fifth and Ukraine was seventy-fourth. In 2006 Belarus ranked sixty-seventh out of 177 countries, while Ukraine was seventy-seventh, Kazakhstan was seventy-ninth, and Moldova was 114th. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2003>.

44 Ravi Abdelal, “Razlichnoe ponimanie vzaimozavisimosti: natsionalnaia bezopasnost’ i torgovlia energoresursami,” in *Mechi i orala* (Russian translation of *Swords and Sustenance*, ed. C. Wallander and R. Legvold [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003]), 126.

45 Lukashenka, “Edinenie—nash istoricheskii vybor.”

46 See <http://belstat.gov.by/>; G. Muzlova, “Belarus’ na fone stran centralnoi i vostochnoi Evropy. Spetsifika regionalizatsii vneshnei torgovli,” in *Regionalizatsiia i tsentralizm v territorial’noi organizatsii obshchestva i regional’nom razviti* (Moscow: IGRAN, 2001).

47 Dean M. Hanink, *Principles and Applications of Economic Geography* (New York: Wiley, 1996), 341–42.

consumers of their goods. This would not pose a serious problem if world commerce were based on the principles of a pure market. However, political factors have an influence here. According to Wallander and Legvold, “The main players in the international system are not firms motivated only by profit incentive and therefore willing to sell any goods to any other firm that can buy, but countries.”⁴⁸ Economic policy is not an exception—countries aim toward definite vectors in their foreign policy. Still, “foreign policy may change quickly, while economic specialization is quite difficult to reverse in a short period of time.”⁴⁹ This makes the state, whose economic system is based upon a narrow specialization on the foreign market, quite vulnerable. Second, commerce eventually leads to the rise of a system of interdependencies between participants in trade relations, in which by far not everyone has the same status. Large countries can easily adapt to any changes in dealership, even its cessation. Albert Hirschman called this phenomenon in international commerce an “influence effect.” “The influence effect of foreign trade derives from the fact that the trade conducted between country A, on the one hand, and countries B, C, D on the other, is worth something for B, C, D, etc., and that they would, therefore, consent to grant A certain advantages—military, political, economic—in order to retain the possibility of trading with A.”⁵⁰

This effect is clearly seen in the relationship between Belarus and Russia, since any change in the political and economic strategy of Russian authorities might bring forth an economic crisis in Belarus. It is this potential influence effect based on economic dependency that has caused many to speak of the Belarusian regime as a Russian protégé. However, the events of 2006–7 showed that even when Russia did decide to use its economic tools and to exert influence upon the Belarusian authorities, the exertion turned out to be purely economic in character, and not exactly political, as if it were trading firms, not political units. The result of the January 2007 negotiations on energy carrier price adjustments was that the Russian side lowered prices. The Belarusian side in turn was obliged to reverse about forty presidential decrees and about twenty resolutions formerly introduced by the government to restrict Russian business on the

48 Wallander and Legvold, *Swords and Sustenance*, 6.

49 Ibid.

50 Albert O. Hirschman, *National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), 17. Quoted in Wallander and Legvold, *Swords and Sustenance*, 7.

territory of Belarus.⁵¹ Thus, Russia acted in order to achieve nothing more than better conditions for Russian business in Belarus.

There is a hidden meaning in the Russian demands because these restrictions, in the view of some authors, were virtually essential for survival of the regime. As Andrew Wilson and Clelia Rontoyanni wrote, "Opening up the national economy to Russian capital, liberalizing the business climate, and giving up monetary emission would erode the state's control over the economy, which has so far enabled President Lukashenka to maintain relatively generous welfare policies, underpinning his popularity among his core constituencies. Moreover, liberalization would foster a new class of Belarusian entrepreneurs likely to seek to advance their own interests in a more pluralistic political landscape."⁵² It is no wonder that the Belarusian official discourse interprets the rise in supply tariffs and the demands of the Russian side as a factual break in the former mode of relations and repudiation of the idea of the union state. On the contrary, according to the Russian side, the achieved agreement is oriented toward "economic integration," and therefore is yet another level of building up the union state. At the same time, some Belarusian analysts see Russia's decision to reduce subsidies to the Belarusian economy as paradoxically positive for the Belarusian regime. They believe these reductions will strengthen the regime, as it may eventually force the Belarusian authorities to start market reforms, and thus to "facilitate the sanitation of the Belarusian economic system and reinforce the authority of Lukashenka as a fighter for Belarus's independence."⁵³ Thus, these events made it evident that Russia does not presently intend to use its economic tools for political purposes.

However, in terms of economy Belarus is dependent not only on its eastern neighbor but also on the European Union (EU). Moreover, the share of exports from Belarus to EU countries is increasing, while the share to Russia is declining. According to data provided by the Belarusian Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, the share of export trade with different countries is as follows: in 2003, 49.2 percent of Belarusian exports went to

51 *Vzgliad Biznes Gazeta*, "Neftianye ustupki," January 17, 2007, www.vz.ru/politics/2007/1/13/64265.html.

52 Andrew Wilson and Clelia Rontoyanni, "Security or Prosperity?" in *Swords and Sustenance*, ed. Wallander and Legvold, 74–75.

53 "Predelnye stavki: mobilizatsiia vs liberalizatsiia," *Nashe mnenie*, January 11, 2007. www.nmnby.org/pub/0701/11d.html.

Russia, and 32.5 percent to the EU; in 2004, the figures were 47 percent and 36.7 percent, respectively; in 2005 for the first time export trade with EU member countries was higher than that with Russia: 44.1 percent (EU) and 35.8 percent (Russia);⁵⁴ in 2006—34.7 percent (Russia) and 45.5 percent (EU).⁵⁵ In other words, the European Union makes a considerable contribution to the development of the Belarusian economy, and, theoretically, also has an economic lever. However, despite all of the ideological discrepancies and tension in terms of policy, they have used no lever. On the one hand, this would mean negative profits for the European countries. Belarus is an important transit state between Russian energy carriers and European consumers. Moreover, the country purveys oil products and potash fertilizers, which is quite significant for some European economies, for example, the Netherlands (17 percent of Belarusian exports go to this country) and the United Kingdom (which receives 7 percent of Belarusian exports). On the other hand, leaders of the Belarusian political opposition, realizing the consequences of possible economic sanctions against the Belarusian state by the European Union, urges their avoidance. Otherwise, should the people's lives deteriorate in any way, the opposition would immediately be found guilty and the authorities would reveal another striking demonstration of their anti-Belarusian people position. As a result, as one writer notes, "being totally isolated ideologically, half-isolated politically, Belarus is completely free of bounds economically. [...] That is [...] the 'Belarusian paradox': 'the last dictatorship of Europe,' ruled by the people whose political style is populist retro, owns an open and dynamically developing economy."⁵⁶ It is no accident that Belarus is sometimes viewed as the "China of Europe."⁵⁷

Many parameters of Belarusian economic development exceed those in neighboring republics, which creates "a trust credit" in public opinion concerning the political strategy of the Belarusian regime. This relative

54 *Ustremennost' v budushchee. Belarus', 1995–2005. Cifry i fakty* (Minsk: Ministerstvo statistiki i analiza RB, 2006) 114–15.

55 Belarusian Ministry of Statistics and Analysis data, <http://belstat.gov.by>.

56 Ya. Shimov, "Belarus: Vostochnoevropeiskii paradoks," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 47 (2006), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2006/47/sh11.html>.

57 Rafal Sadowski and Marek Tejchman, "Czy Chiny są Białorusią Azji?," *Polski portal finansowy*, August 19, 2005, www.money.pl/gospodarka/tokfm/arttykul/czy;chiny;sa;bialorusia;azji,162,0,129442.html.

stability of the economic situation in the country, that has been attained without painful radical reforms, is one of the grounds on which the popularity of the Belarusian authorities is built.⁵⁸

CIVIL SOCIETY: THE PARALLEL WORLD OF THE BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION

In a society built on the principle of “the authorities’ monopoly of power,” political parties, unions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as well as non-state-owned trade unions and non-state-funded media share a common destiny—they are ousted from the official public scene into a peculiar parallel world, where the counter-elite gather and compose the sphere of counter-politics. The existence of the “third sector” in Belarus is connected with numerous limitations and conventions that reduce its sense of existence to a constant struggle for survival.

The development of nongovernmental organizations in Belarus began quite late, and from the very start they faced problems of legitimization. Before 1994, the third sector had no legislative ground, “The Law on Public Associations” was adopted only in October 1994. During the early years of Belarusian independence, a major portion of NGOs represented organizations that had evolved from the remnants of the Komsomol and other typical Soviet organizations (such as veterans of war or labor). Only a few of them managed to eliminate state control and become independent. The first independent NGOs in Belarus focused on ecological problems (e.g., the foundation “To the Children of Chernobyl,” 1989) or on youth work (e.g., “The Confederation of Youth Association,” 1989). Since Lukashenka came to power, the Belarusian third sector has found itself under rigid pressure from the state.

Belarusian political scientist U. Rouda has written about three waves of

58 Belarusian political scientist U. Rouda writes that the correlation between the economic state and political loyalty of Belarusian citizens is not direct, but reverse. Hence, here is the paradox: “Those with worse living standards vote for Lukashenko, the more prosperous and better-educated groups of population vote for his opponents. [...] That is why Russia’s further efforts to provide Belarusian economic growth will inevitably lead to greater numbers of Belarusian citizens who internally reject the provincial “sovok” (Soviet mentality) no matter how authoritarian the methods whereby it is implanted.” U. Rouda, “Zachem nuzhen Putinu ‘domashnij diktator’,” *Belorusy i rynok*, May 3, 2006.

repressions against nongovernmental organizations and associations during the history of the Belarusian state—in 1997, 1999, and 2003.⁵⁹

The first wave launched an attack on NGOs when the state launched a campaign against the most active organizations—the Belarusian Soros Foundation was closed down, the Foundation "Detiam Chernobyla" ("To the Children of Chernobyl") and Tsentr Strategicheskikh initsiativ "Vostok-Zapad" (Center for Strategic Initiatives East-West) were criminally prosecuted. In 1999, the second decree was issued, ordering all NGOs, political parties, and trade unions to re-register. In addition, the decree stipulated the establishment of a Commission on the Registration and Re-registration of Public Associations, attached to the president's administration,⁶⁰ the decisions of which affected the activities of organizations. As a result, the number of NGOs in Belarus declined from 2,500 to 1,300. (By four years later the number of NGOs had not reached the previous level. According to the Ministry of Justice, 2,248 nongovernmental organizations and associations were registered in the country in 2007.) The decree actually introduced the mandatory legal registration of existing nongovernmental organizations and associations. Finally, in 2003 the state began to actively eliminate the most active NGOs, a list of more than twenty. Simultaneously, an active campaign began to set up GoNGOs (state nongovernmental organizations). The president signed a decree "On Republican (National) State Public Associations" that were state-funded and intended to fulfill "assignments significant to the state." Among these organizations were the Young Pioneers' Organization, the official Union of Journalists, and the Belarusian National Youth League (BRSM). At the same time, a number of nongovernmental youth organizations were closed down—the Belarusian Students' Association, the Youth Information Center, the Youth AGP, and the Youth Front. Enjoying all kinds of preferences these organizations are in fact tools of state ideology that play the role of "simulators" of civil society. They actively publicize themselves in the state-funded press and electronic media, and give an impression of the existence of pseudo-civil society in the public space. Meanwhile, activities of the real "third sector" are largely limited by legislative restrictions, ideological pressure, and the information vacuum within which they exist.

59 U. Rouda, "Tretsiaia khvalia, albo suchasnyia asablivastsi zmaganiia belaruskaga rezhimu z nezaleznyimi niauradavymy arganizatsiami," *Analitika Informatsionno-analiticheskij tsentr NGO*, 2002 http://iac.unibel.by/anl_ng002.htm.

60 In 2007 this commission was dissolved, and the Ministry of Justice became responsible for all of these issues.

Civil society is able to play the part of a constructive, mobilizing force as a sphere of public life that is able to control the state. But to do this, the third sector must preserve its independence from the state, and the idea of such control must become popular in society. In Belarus, as political scientist V. Bobrovich writes, civil society exists “in the form of a political project implemented by different political and nonpolitical institutions.”⁶¹ Belarusian citizens’ lack of interest in them makes their position vulnerable to prosecution and repression. Thus, the prospect of development of civil society finds itself in a kind of vicious circle: for this sphere to start functioning as a “third sector” it must become a mobilizing force in society. But in order to win positions in society and to attract support it must currently be operating and demonstrating convincing evidence of the constructive nature of its independence.

The development of the Belarusian political party system is in a similar vicious circle. The party system in post-Soviet states is, on the one hand, a means of democratization, and on the other hand, itself one of the primary products of such democratization. Parties as institutions that represent the people should consolidate themselves in societies where trust in political institutions is shaken. “There essentially were no public politics in the communist era [...]: there were no self-governing institutions, no interest groups or rival parties operating independent of the state, and no competing sources of information,”⁶² Karen Dawisha writes. All these should have been set up in a new society, but the main problem appears to be not so much institutional “white spots” in the public space of society as lack of realization by the majority of the population that their social life is deficient.

One can speak of two periods in the development of Belarus’s party system. The 1990–96 period is characterized by slow but stable movement toward consolidation, as leading parties enjoyed growing support in society and occupied different positions in power structures. As such, the party system remained quite weak, although precisely at that time the population in Belarus was close to political mobilization. In the first years of independence, mass actions in Minsk attracted up to 50,000 participants. The Belarusian Popular Front, the main political force of a national and democratic orientation, had 150,000 members at that time.

The second period, after 1996 is related to the departure of anti-regime parties from official politics into a “parallel world” and their shift to a stra-

61 Viacheslav Bobrovich, “Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo—novaia sotsial’naia utopia?” *Adkrytaie gramadstva*, no. 5 (107) (1998), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/107/5.html>.

62 Dawisha, “Democratization and Political Participation,” 47.

tegy of self-defense after the president dissolved the legitimately elected parliament. Only parties loyal to Lukashenka entered the new parliament (the National Assembly) and now continue to have official support. The official Belarusian authorities, who have never tried to establish effective communications with other political actors, began to treat opposition political parties as anti-state formations and to interpret their intention to participate in power as an almost subversive, if not illegal, activity.

Opinion polls reveal that in Belarusian society the number of those with a clear idea of the country's existing political parties remains at a level of 20 percent of the population, and as few as 1 percent are directly involved in their activities.⁶³ Lack of interest in political parties is reflected in the results of parliamentary elections: in 2004 not a single representative of an opposition party was elected to parliament. Independent researchers also express distrust for parties as political institutions. According to an IISEPS opinion poll in the project "Whom Do Belarusians Trust?" among the institutions Belarusians trust, last position was occupied by opposition parties. Their trust rate "proved to be even below that of the police (militia), traditionally the population's least favorite institution"—the trust rate of opposition parties was 15 percent and distrust 60 percent in 2005, while in 2004, the respective rates were 20 percent and 48.5 percent. Trust in pro-governmental parties was just slightly higher—the trust rate was 28.8 percent in 2005 and 26 percent in 2004, while distrust amounted to 47.3 percent in 2004 and 48.6 percent in 2005.⁶⁴ Remarkably, almost equal distrust of pro- and antigovernmental parties suggests that distrust of parties is stipulated not by their own programs and political orientations, but by the existing political environment, in which parties in fact have no definite place. As M. Plisko writes, "none of them, even the pro-Lukashenka Communist Party of Belarus, feel involved in governing the state."⁶⁵ Progovernmental parties have no role in the political system because the power structure assigns them no function, and they remain a purely decorative element of "Belarusian democracy." Antigovernmental parties work in ideological and structural conditions that a priori do not permit any opposition. As political practice shows, it appears to be impossible to simul-

63 D. G. Rotman and A. N. Danilov, "President and Opposition. Specific Features of the Belarusian Political Scene," in Korosteleva, Lawson, and Marsh, *Contemporary Belarus*, 108.

64 "Komu doveriaut belorusy," *Arkhiv analitiki IISEPS*, September 2005, <http://www.iiseps.org/9-05-3.html>.

65 Mikhail Plisko, "Partogenez w sovremennoi Belarusi," *Adkrytaie gramadstva* no. 2 (8) (2000), <http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.00/4.html>.

taneously remain in a state of permanent struggle with the regime and to stand up for the interests of civil society.

Elena A. Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson and Rosalind J. Marsh offer an explanation for this phenomenon: "Belarusian voters are torn between supporting their preferred political parties, which in a normal democracy would promise some direct or at least indirect representation for them, and the President, whose monopolization of power means that only he can satisfy their demands."⁶⁶ As a result, even those who may share the views and values of a certain party cast their votes not in its favor, but for a political "actor" who possesses real influence. A peculiar situation emerges, where "the electorates of the presidential and anti-system parties considerably overlap, and this forms an environment for vote switching along the 'president-anti-president' divide."⁶⁷ E. Korosteleva calls this kind of electoral behavior of voters "rational flexibility:" it "allows them to pursue their own short-term policies despite their ideological motivations and personal beliefs."⁶⁸

Karen Dawisha writes about conditions in which political parties have a chance to establish themselves as credible institutions. "Parties will gain pre-eminence as intermediary institutions only if elections are regular, free and fair; and the holding of regular, and free and fair elections will increase civic trust over time."⁶⁹ Application of these politological truths to the Belarusian situation again leads to a kind of vicious circle: for a strong party system to appear in Belarus regular and fair elections must take place, which can result in trust in parties as political institutions. But such elections should be conditioned by functioning machinery of political representation in society. In practice in Belarus's nontransparent elections, where the authorities use different means of struggle with representatives of anti-regime parties (discrediting representatives of opposition political forces in the mass media, eliminating candidates at the registration stage, using administrative resources, that is, pressure on voters, and, finally using a nontransparent procedure for counting votes), it leads to the ousting of political parties from the public sphere. As a result, interest in them consi-

66 Korosteleva, Lawson, and Marsh, "Introduction. Paradoxes of Democratization in Post-communist Belarus," 9.

67 Elena Korosteleva, "Party System Development in Post Communist Belarus," in *Contemporary Belarus*, ed. Korosteleva, Lawson, and March (London-New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 78.

68 Ibid.

69 Dawisha, "Democratization and Political Participation," 52.

derably diminishes, their presence is no longer connected in people’s minds with a possible solution of any problems.

According to Belarusian political scientist M. Plisko, Belarusian parties had a chance of full-fledged development. “Before autumn 1996, even in the conditions of a semi-presidential republic, there existed a possibility of shaping a political system with built-in political parties. And if the ensuing parliamentary elections took place in normal political circumstances and under the former constitutional order—some five to ten years later [...] we could have a number of quite strong and influential parties. [...] In the new Belarusian reality, parliament has become a supplement to the president’s administration, and is deprived of many rights, while local representative power, in turn, has grown into an appendage of the president’s vertical.”⁷⁰ From this point of view, the ideological state of public space of contemporary Belarus is in many respects similar to that of the pre-perestroika period. Partial institutional conservation of the system of power is conducive to this process. At first sight, the power structure in Belarus has undergone serious transformations at the national level, with the introductions of the institution of the presidency and a two-chamber parliament. However, at the local level there have been many fewer changes. The old “Soviets” were simply adapted to the requirements of the new system, and in addition, since 1996, all heads of local executive committees have been appointed by the president. As A. Yekadumau writes, we observe a “continuity of the basic principles of power implementation in the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic and in the contemporary independent Republic of Belarus.”⁷¹

The establishment of centralism in the new power structure was conducive to conservation in the public consciousness of old ideas about the political power machine in the country. Within such conceptions, the presence of several parties in the country’s political space creates a landscape that does not correspond to the models of cognitive political experience generated by the Soviet system. One feature of political experience in the socialist version was the “indivisibility” of public space, that is, its homogeneity, which is used to create the illusion of “civil peace.” The socialist regime aspired to build a political system that not only compelled each citizen to enter its sociopolitical program but also excluded the very concept

70 Plisko, “Partogenez w sovremennoi Belarusi,” <http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.00/4.html>.

71 Andrei Yekadumau, “Palitychnaia systema Belarusi z 1990 pa 1996,” in *Belaruskaja palitychnaia systema i prezydentskija vybary 2001*, ed. V. Bulgakau (Minsk–Warsaw: Analytical Group IDEE, 2001), <http://kamunikat.org/knihi.html?pubid=1811>.

of interests different from those of the ruling elite identified with the interests of the state.⁷² At the same time, such categories as “motherland” and “the people” were also interpreted as inseparable in principle and never prone to subdivision. That is why the language of power defines the struggle for power in the Belarusian political landscape not as the “absorption” of part of the electorate but as the right to identify itself with the whole—the nation, the country, Belarus. In this situation, political parties, whose very nature presupposes fragmentation of the political landscape, and NGOs that exist as a sphere separate from the state and aim to represent interests independent of it begin to be described in the authorities’ rhetoric and in the ensuing comprehension of the pro-presidentially minded part of the population as violators of the civil peace. The old frameworks of political experience formed in Belarusian society serve as another obstacle in the third sector’s development. Parties and NGOs are united into a common camp of “nonpower,” which, correspondingly, falls out of the space represented by the authorities and in which the real process of making decisions about the country’s development is implemented.

72 Robert F. Miller, “Civil Society in Communist System: An Introduction,” in *The Development of Civil Society in Communist System*, ed. R. F. Miller (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), 5.

Prerequisites of Democratization and Authoritarianism in Belarus

In the early 1990s, the prospects of Belarus's democratic transformation appear to be quite optimistic. Alexander Motyl wrote in 1991: "Virtually identical economic systems, common economic problems, and a shared cultural and historical legacy suggest that a new Eastern Europe, incorporating Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Belorussia, the Ukraine and Lithuania, will emerge in the new future."¹ However, the course of the systemic transformations in these countries has brought different results. Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Lithuania have become members of the European Union. Ukraine has survived its orange revolution and remains in the state of uncertainty as to its further way of development. Belarus has become "the last dictatorship in Europe," a country with an authoritarian mode of rule, command economy, and suppressed civil society.

The range of scenarios from which post-communist countries draw their future is not extensive. One scenario is stable pluralist democracy, or "becoming like the West," which is typified by a general commitment to the "rules of the game."² Another scenario is an authoritarian regime, which may "emerge as a result of the will of a majority of citizens" or may be "imposed by a small minority." Among authoritarian regimes "one should distinguish between regimes that opt for a basically capitalist system, albeit with a relatively high level of state involvement in the economy, and those that seek a return to many elements of the command economy."³ The third scenario is "of an essentially directionless long-term transition, in which governments change with abnormal frequency, and keep attempting to change direction."⁴

The Belarusian choice has led to establishing an authoritarian regime, and appeared "according to the will of the majority," and in the economic

1 Alexander J. Motyl, "Totalitarian Collapse, Imperial Disintegration, and the Rise of the Soviet West: Implication for the West," in *The Rise of Nations in the Soviet Union*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), 54.

2 Holmes, *Post-Communism*, 344.

3 Holmes, *Post-Communism*, 344.

4 Holmes, *Post-Communism*, 344.

part of the program it counts on the command economy model. Although, as Vl. Zviglyanich notes, the favorable factors that laid the groundwork for Lukashenka's regime in Belarus are not entirely a Belarusian phenomenon. "The phenomenon of Lukashenkism could have a different name, a different area of localization, even different protagonists [...] The social basis for Lukashenkism exists in almost every country of the former Soviet Union, with the exception of the Baltics."⁵

The rise of the authoritarian political regime can be considered the reverse side of the democratic project failure. Works that touch on the topic of "democracy prerequisites"⁶ mention, among others, such prevalent factors as standard of living and social inequality level, a certain level of urbanization and education, as well as experience in market reforms and liberalization. The list of most essential factors gives special attention to economy, political culture, and institutional legacy of a society.⁷ Such logic presupposes that a number of specific conditions affected the development of Belarusian society. Leslie Holmes writes that "post-communism grows out of communism as it was actually practiced, and is a product of the anti-communist, double-rejective revolutions of 1989–91 [...] The first rejection was of what was perceived to be external domination (... in case of the USSR, it was by Russia) [...] The second rejection was of communism as a system of power."⁸ The dependence of "the formula" of post-communism on the peculiar implementation of communist formation in case of Belarus is especially clear. Between 1991 and 1994 Belarus exemplified the "standard" double rejection. It was predominantly displayed in the political layout of the country—in the alliance of ideas from the nationalist and democratic range. "Most of the nationalist organizations in Belarus arose on the basis of the republic's democratic movements, created during the days of Gorbachev's perestroika. This pertains, above all, to the Belarusian Popular Front [BPF], led by Zenon Poznyak, the Belarusian National-De-

5 Vl. Zviglyanich, "The Lost World: Belarus as a Model of Political Necromancy," [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[swords\]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews\[any_of_the_words\]=Zviglyanich&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=6883&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=13625cc017](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[swords]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews[any_of_the_words]=Zviglyanich&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=6883&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=13625cc017).

6 S. Haggard and R. Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); S. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); D. Rueschemeyer, E. Huber Stephens, and J. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

7 Holmes, *Post-Communism*, 345–346.

8 Holmes, *Post-Communism*, 14–15.

mocratic party, the Belarusian Social Democratic Gramada, and several other organizations.”⁹ At the same time, the “nationalization” of Belarusian democratic movements took place as a result of the activity of the so-called patriotic forces, which after December 1991 advocated restoration of the USSR in various forms and were movements of an authoritarian type, and because of opponents of liberal market economy and democratic freedoms. Patriotic forces were united in the Slav Union “Belaia Rus” formed in 1992; another large imperially-oriented organization was the Belarusian People’s Movement (NDB), which was also created in 1992. The latter was a coalition of “Belaya Rus,” communist, and pro-communist organizations. In those circumstances, “many Belarusian democrats gradually began to associate the fight against the totalitarian threat and the fight for human and democratic values with an activity directed towards preserving and reinforcing Belarusian sovereignty.”¹⁰

Among the factors essential for successful post-communist democratization in many authors’ views is the country’s past democratic experience. Samuel Huntington’s research points out that twenty-three out of twenty-nine countries belonging to “the third wave” of democratization had a prior democratic experience. At the same time, the countries that did not follow the path of democratization had had no such experience.¹¹ Having prior democratic experience affects a country’s present situation in different ways. If it is relatively new, “it may provide ‘human capital,’ that is persons with a first-hand understanding of democratic institutions and practice who can launch and maintain the new political arrangement.”¹² But even if the experience had taken place in the historically distant past, “it may provide instructive lessons in the design of democratic institutions matched to the particular features of the country in question.”¹³ Moreover, previous democratic experience can help “legitimize new democratic institutions by protecting them against the xenophobic charge that they are alien cultural import.”¹⁴ The Belarusian experience confirms the latter scenario—the

9 Vasily Andreev, “Nationalist Currents in Belarus,” *PRISM* 3, no. 1 (1997), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=19500&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=219](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=19500&tx_ttnews[backPid]=219).

10 Andreev, “Nationalist Currents in Belarus.”

11 Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 40–46.

12 Bruce Parrott, “Perspectives on Postcommunist Democratization,” in *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

13 Parrott, “Perspectives on Postcommunist Democratization,” 11.

14 Parrott, “Perspectives on Postcommunist Democratization,” 11.

idea of liberal Western-type democracy as an alien form of organizing social life is actively exploited by the Belarusian official rhetoric.

One has to acknowledge that unfavorable conditions related to the lack of a real democratic experience are typical for nearly all post-communist countries. Unavailability of such “usable democratic past” in many countries was compensated with disgust of the repressive communist regime, a sort of negative learning became a potential source of aspiration for political transformation.¹⁵ But the negative experience factor did not work in Belarus in favor of democratization. According to Ioffe, “Despite the ingrained flaws of the Soviet model of economic development, Belarus was an undeniable Soviet success story. All the impulses and/or driving forces of Belarus’s achievements, and their side affects as well, have been of Soviet vintage.”¹⁶ Many scholars attribute the Belarusian economic success within the Soviet Union to Russia’s contribution.¹⁷ But it did not diminish the significance of Belarusian economic development; rather, it made Belarusians aware of the fact that their economic success “was made possible by Belarus being a part of a larger entity, the Soviet Union.”¹⁸ The well-known comparison of Belarus with the Soviet Union’s “show-case” refers us to this status of the republic as the best-looking part of a large country. It was no accident that Vasili Leonov (a “partocrat” in the Soviet times, a minister of agriculture appointed by Lukashenka, and later an opposition politician) remarked that Belarusians did not experience stagnation, as the years of Soviet ‘decay’ were for Belarusians the years of rapid economic development, improvement of the lifestyle of the population’s majority.¹⁹ This state of economic affairs has affected the perception of the Soviet experience by Belarusians as a positive one. According to the opinion poll conducted by Christian W. Haerpfer, Belarusians viewed their Soviet experience more positive than any other Eastern European region: 68 percent claimed that the communist rule “was a good way of running things,” or at least tolerable.²⁰

15 Parrott, “Perspectives on Postcommunist Democratization,” 12.

16 Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape,” 89.

17 For example, *Independent Belarus: Domestic Determinations, Regional Dynamics, and Implications for the West*, ed. Margarita M. Balmaceda, James I. Clem, Lisbeth L. Tarlow (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

18 Ioffe, “Understanding Belarus,” 89.

19 Vasili Leonov, *Rabota nad oshibkami* (Smolensk: Skif, 2003), 69.

20 Christian W. Haerpfer, *Democracy and Enlargement in Post-Communist Europe: The Democratization of the General Public in 15 Central and Eastern European Countries, 1991–1998* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 16.

Especially significant for democratization of post-communist society is its pre-communist period; that is, the parameters of pre-communist social and political experience determine the success of transformation. "Those countries which are being 're-born' after a period of communist suppression," writes Dawisha, "would have an enormous advantage over states being established for the first time."²¹ Countries with the experience of their own statehood possess a kind of institutional matrix, on which they can start building a new political and social system. That is why they can require less time to form institutions, adopt constitutions and other basic laws. Such states also have fewer problems in establishing a new format of relations between the state and society based on national unity ideas. But the newly founded states have no historical experience and collective memory that can contribute to harmonization of relationship between the state and society; memory that could nourish and support "the new nation." A picture is different if the experience of statehood is limited by the communist epoch. One of the peculiarities of a socialist state is its repressive function in relation to society and nation. According to Dawisha, "nation in this case was often subordinated to the needs of the state and symbiotically tied to the state."²² If a state has no "non-socialist" experience and legacy, after the epoch of "communism building" it faces a difficult problem of structural reconstruction of a fundamentally new base of relations among the nation, society, and state system. Indeed, one can assume that because of the lack of the Belarusian independent statehood outside the communist regime,²³ a typically socialist model of relations between the state and society is often perceived by the major part of Belarusians as a variety, if not the main representation of a political norm.

Meanwhile some authors question the exclusively negative influence of the country's legacy in the choice of Belarusian development scenario. For example, Silitski writes that in order to understand the Belarusian phenomenon it is worthwhile to refer to the factors "which are usually considered as favourable to a country's prospects for establishing a democracy."²⁴ In Silitski's opinion, such potential prerequisites of democratization in Belarus, which nonetheless have not worked, can be "the high level of urbanization and educational attainment in society, the absence of serious ethnic or religious conflicts, the low degree of income inequality, and the

21 Dawisha, "Democratization and Political Participation," 45.

22 Dawisha, "Democratization and Political Participation," 45.

23 At least, it is how the Belarusian tradition looks in the official history textbooks.

24 Silitski, "Explaining Post-Communist Authoritarianism in Belarus," 37.

fact that public attitudes at the beginning of the period of political change were not any more anti-democratic than they were in many other post-communist societies, many of which have undergone quite successful democratic transitions.”²⁵

As Christian W. Haerpfer has demonstrated, the Belarusian population cannot be simplistically characterized as antidemocratically minded. Haerpfer compares the support for democracy and the support for non-democratic alternatives within Belarusian population with the democratic and non-democratic political behavior in six other post-Soviet countries: the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.²⁶ This comparative analysis is viewed by the author as an individual example within a more extended crosscountry research conducted in fifteen countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The research monitors the general response of societies in post-communist countries to economic, social, and political transformations after the collapse of the communist system.²⁷ For comparison Haerpfer devised the Index of Democracy, which displays assessment of the regime displacement in society. “The aim of this Index is to measure the extent of democratization at the level of the individual of societies in transformation from non-democratic to democratic regimes. [...] This index does not measure the rating of the performance of the current government at a given time; it is supposed to measure the support for democracy as a principle and a form of regime, as opposed to other, non-democratic forms of political regime.”²⁸

The Index of Democracy proposed by Christian W. Haerpfer consists of nine different characteristics:

1. Negative rating of communist political regime in the past;
2. Positive rating of New Democracy or current political regime;
3. Optimism about the future of democratic parliaments;
4. Support for the democratic national parliament;

25 Silitski, “Explaining Post-Communist Authoritarianism in Belarus,” 37. He refers to the analysis in A. Finter and E. Mickiewicz, “Redefining the Political System of the USSR: Mass Support for Political Change,” *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 4 (1992): 857–74.

26 Haerpfer, “Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared,” in *Contemporary Belarus*, ed. E. A. Korosteleva, C. W. Lawson, and R. J. Marsh (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 85–99.

27 Haerpfer, “Democracy and Enlargement in Post-Communist Europe.” Within the framework of this research the author conducted over 10,000 interviews between 1992 and 1998.

28 Haerpfer, “Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared,” 94.

5. Rejection of an authoritarian leader as an alternative to democracy;
6. Rejection of a military regime as an alternative to democracy;
7. Rejection of a monarchy as an alternative to democracy;
8. Rejection of a return to a communist political regime as an alternative to democracy;
9. Optimism about the future of democracy.²⁹

The comparison between the Index of Democracy in the political outlook of Belarusian society and the electorate of other post-communist countries surprisingly shows that in Belarus there is “a political system with the second highest share of ‘democrats’³⁰ within the national electorate amongst all post soviet countries (only behind Estonia). In 1998, it was found that 41 percent of the Belarusian population are ‘democrats’ in terms of their political attitudes and their political behavior.”³¹ On the whole, judging by the basic parameters of political outlooks, Belarus fits the framework of the “North bloc,” together with the three Baltic states, as it demonstrates indexes close to those of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. At the same time, the Russian population makes a different and much larger political compound, together with Ukraine and Moldova. In addition, Christian W. Haerpfer compares the indexes of political views of Belarusians in different years within the period of nine years (1992–2000) and finds the data remarkable: “In 1994, only 23 percent of the post-Soviet citizens in Belarus could be characterized as pluralistic democrats. In the four years between 1994 and 1998 the number of Belarusian ‘democrats’ almost doubled, reaching the level of 41 per cent.”³²

Haerpfer considers one of the main results of his comparative analysis to be the statistical demonstration of the fact that the Belarusian electorate “does not fulfill the popular expectations nourished by international publications and media, which suggests that Belarus and, by implication, its population are non-democratic and somehow politically backward. In an empirical ranking of the six post Soviet countries analysed, the population of Belarus came second behind Estonia with regard to a support for pluralistic democracy. Only Estonia and Belarus fulfill criteria of an ‘emer-

29 Haerpfer, “Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared,” 94.

30 Only those people have been included in the calculation of the Index of Democracy who are in at least seven out of nine items, which ensues very strict definition of “democrats.”

31 Haerpfer, “Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared,” 97.

32 Haerpfer, “Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared,” 95–96.

ging democracy'³³ with a share of more than 40 percent of the electorate being 'democrats' in a very strict definition."³⁴

Another factor of a positive development of the democratic reforms in the country was the degree of political mobilization of the population in the early and mid-1990s. It is an evidence of the society's readiness for transformations; in March and April 1996 the BPF organized mass street demonstration, attracting 50,000 participants. By comparison, the number of participants in the protests following the 2004 referendum, which allowed the president to hold the office for indefinite number of terms, did not exceed 5,000. The political protest against the falsification of the presidential election results in March 2006 attracted close to 20,000, but the level of the population's political involvement at the time did not reach that of the mid-1990s.

Many authors write about the responsibility of the political elite for the Belarusian "course of events" and the failure of democratization. "What counts most is what political leaders and elite make of the past, of economic dependency, and of the Russian factor,"³⁵ write Legvold and Wallander. Silitski believes that "an explanation of post-communist political development in Belarus should [...] account for the factors and events that have influenced its transformation in the last decade, rather than being exclusively focused on the legacies of the Soviet past or of even earlier historical periods."³⁶ Such analysis of the dynamic political process and not the structural objective data enables us to seek the subjective factors dependent on the behavior and choices of the political actors. Silitski believes that following "the process-oriented approach," which states that actual processes are able to neutralize the negative legacy and affect the results of democratization helps to avoid the "spirit of predestination" characteristic for the studies of the Belarusian transformation in the context of its cultural and institutional legacy. Crawford and Lijphart point out that "the imperatives of liberalization" may become the tools for over-

33 Society can be characterized as an "emerging democracy" if more than 40 percent of the electorate are identified as "democrats;" as "consolidated democracy"—if there are more than 40 percent of democrats in it; less than 40 percent—society is defined as "transforming society." According to Haerpfer, the outcome of transformation in the societies defined as "transforming" is uncertain and does not lead necessarily towards democracy. Haerpfer, "Electoral Politics of Belarus compared," 95.

34 Haerpfer, "Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared," 96–97.

35 Robert Legvold and Celeste A. Wallander, "Conclusion," in *Swords and Sustenance*, ed. R. Legvold and C. A. Wallander (Cambridge: MTI Press, 2003), 229.

36 Silitski, "Explaining Post-Communist Authoritarianism in Belarus," 36.

coming the communist legacy: “new institutions can be crafted and new international pressure can be brought that shut out the negative influences of the past.”³⁷ The key concept in the process-oriented approach is “crafting,” which can be understood as a consistent, purposeful set of actions undertaken in order to initiate the transformation (or destruction) of a political regime.³⁸ However, when isolated from the cultural, historical, and institutional data such an approach “fails to address the factors that shape actors’ political preferences, the conditions under which these preferences change. And even the identity of pivotal actors.”³⁹

The interconnection between the legacy’s different manifestations and the process of building a democratic system by definite people with their ideas and skills “to craft” democracy has a sophisticated design. Legacy—whether cultural, historical, or institutional—not only affects the state of the social landscape, but it also shapes political forces, and, in some sense, predetermines their political identity. At the same time, the way the elements of the legacy function is very much determined by the strategy selected by the political actors.

The political strategy chosen by the Belarusian nationalists is to a large extent based on a certain concept of the Belarusian identity. Thus, Belarus gives an illustrative example of a dialectical interdependence between society’s legacy and the strategy of its use by political forces. National identity as a state of society’s self-consciousness and a part of legacy, national idea as a basis for the political ideology articulated by the politicians and nationalism as a groundwork of political movement is one of the key factors of the Belarusian democratization’s failure.

37 Beverly Crawford and Arend Lijphart, “Explaining Political and Economic Change in Post-Communist Eastern Europe: Old Legacies, New Institutions, Hegemonic Norms, and International Pressures,” *Comparative Political Studies* 28, no. 2 (1995): 172.

38 G. de Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

39 S. Haggard and R. Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5–6.

*Belarus as an Example of National
and Democratic Failure*

In the early 1990s, at the beginning of the system transformations, the main force of Belarusian nationalism was the Belarusian People's Front (BPF). The BPF was one of the few truly active mass organizations in post-communist Belarus. Being a modified party organization it had "a relatively active regional network based on cells, clubs, and caucuses; flexible membership, associated not with fees, but commitment to promote the party's name and ideology, and intensive 'street canvassing'."¹ The party's popularity is evident by the fact that in the early 1990s its membership reached 150,000. No other political party could boast of such numbers.

However, the ideas of national revival preached by the BPF rapidly and unexpectedly ceased to attract favorable disposition of Belarusian society. As early as in 1994, there were no serious candidates for presidency from the nationalist movement. The main struggle for the office developed between the representative of the nomenclature, prime minister V. Kebich, and a non-party candidate A. Lukashenka. Different researchers call attention to different reasons that caused the loss of popularity by Belarusian nationalists.

Motyl's writings address general organizational immaturity of the popular fronts that arose in specific conditions of the totalitarian system. "Detotalization has suddenly cast republican popular fronts in roles—as political parties and state-builders—for which they are singularly unprepared. Social movements are excellent vehicles of popular mobilization or of single-issue politics. Everyday politics, on the other hand, requires professional organization and nonpartisan institutions that can act as channels for a variety of political forces."² The Belarusian People's Front was successful in the political mobilization related to some painful issues of Soviet Belarusian history, like the after-effects of Chernobyl or Kuropaty. But it proved to be unable to draw mass support during the transition to an integral program of social transformations.

1 Korosteleva, "Party System Development in Post Communist Belarus," 76.

2 Motyl, "Totalitarian Collapse, Imperial Disintegration, and the Rise of the Soviet West," 52–53.

Rouda writes that the failure of Belarusian nationalist forces was a strategic one, since they emphasized the wrong priorities in the political struggle. Opposition leaders “failed to realize that any mass resocialization is doomed to failure if it is not implemented by the state; that, because of this, the political tasks are of more superior importance than cultural ones at a given historical stage.”³ Another author notes that “the democratic movement failed because its leaders were not able to find the right correlation between the national and the democratic components in the struggle for political power in the country.”⁴

Many authors believe that the roots of the political failure of the national front are in the nation-definition they had chosen. The rhetoric of the Belarusian nation revival underlying the political program leaned on the fragment of the Belarusian population that was aware of its particular “Belarusianness” and manifested its devotion to the Belarusian language and pre-Soviet past. Uladzimir Konan discloses the BPF’s idea of the nation: “actually just nationally conscious Belarusians belong to the Belarusian nation, as well as those representatives of ethnic minorities who live in the context of the Belarusian language and culture. While those ethnic Belarusians who are not Belarusian-conscious and objectively do not live in the context of the national language and culture, in effect, fall out of the nation, they belong to it only eventually, that is only possible in certain social and political conditions.”⁵

Thus, in their definition of the nation, the nationalists laid down the principle of exclusiveness. The national idea built on this principle did not so much unite people as divided them. Nationalist forces were not able to formulate a political ideology of the majority, because from the start they based their presence in society on the opposition of the “nationally indifferent,” to those conscious of their Belarusianness and actively supporting the promotion of the Belarusian language and Belarusian ethnic and national identity in its anti-Russian mode.

In a 2003 essay titled “Without Us,” Valiantsin Akudovich displays a critical reflection of the political and cultural ideology of the Belarusian

3 Uadzimir Rouda, “Belorusskaia kontrelita: sostoianie i vozmoznyie modeli povedenia,” *Analitika Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr NGO*, 2001, http://iac.unibel.by/anl_el0010.htm.

4 “Demokratia i natsionalizm kak alfa i omega politicheskogo protsessa,” *Adkrytaie gramadstva* no. 2 (11) (2001), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/5.html>.

5 Uladzimir Konan, “Belarus’ na miazhy tysiachagoddzia: shtrykhi da gistarychnaga, palitychnaga i dukhounaga partretu natsii,” *Acta Albaruthenica*, 2 (2001): 156.

nationalism in the early 1990s. "Using an overstatement we may say that the *adradzhen'ne* [resurgence] as we had formulated and tried to realize it was a kind of intellectual genocide of Belarusian society, as it rejected the right to evaluate their own lives not only to contemporaries, but also to prior generations who had lived for two hundred years without complaint under the yoke of the Eastern colonizer."⁶ This symbolic genocide of the part of Belarusian people who did not immediately respond to the maximalist appeal of the national movement of the early 1990s became one of the causes of a political exodus among those who found themselves on the list of those not conscious of their Belarusianness. As a result, by the mid-1990s the nationalist rhetoric in Belarusian society had a reverse effect. The part of society that did not support the hard anti-Russian rhetoric (but at the same time did not mind Belarusian national independence at all and could be democratically minded in principle) left the ranks of those mobilized by Belarusian nationalism, which often meant abandoning politics. These reflections emphasize the inability of the Belarusian nationalists to craft political changes in society and their miscalculations in grounding the political practices. But the top place on the list of the reasons for the failure of nationalist political forces is occupied by the national self-consciousness of the Belarusian people themselves, or, to be precise, by its absence. This failure is seen by many researchers as a direct symptom of the weakness of Belarusian national identity that comprises the basis of the Belarusian people's cultural and historical legacy. The defeat of the political nationalism appears predetermined. A collection of quotations about the Belarusian identity from works by Western researchers gives the impression of nearly common agreement on this issue.

In the book titled *A Denationalized Nation* David Marples shows that nationalism did not become a new ideology of Belarusians after the disintegration of the Soviet empire and was not able to take the role of a consolidating force of Belarusian society.⁷ Marples explains it by the alienation of Belarusians from their own national idea, which resulted from decades of the Soviet period that became an obstacle on the way to democratic society. George Sanford sees post-communist Belarus as a "combining weak or divided national consciousness with an insignificant experience of independent statehood."⁸ Ed Jocelyn says that in Belarus "natio-

6 Valiantsin Akudovich, "Bez nas," *Nasha Niva*, April 28, 2003.

7 David R. Marples, *Belarus A Denationalized Nation* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1999).

8 George Sanford, "Nation, State and Independence in Belarus," *Contemporary Politics* 3, no. 3 (1997): 227.

nal consciousness is a highly problematic concept,” and that “Belarusian national identity is fragmented, and its roots lead in different directions.”⁹ Korosteleva, Lawson, and Marsh write about the “three key features of post-communist Belarus: the relative absence of nationalist sentiment; the failure of the opposition; and the popularity of President Lukashenka.”¹⁰ Kathleen Michalisko sees these factors as interconnected: it is “the absence of nationalism—in its primarily definition of devotion to the interests of a nation—that makes Lukashenka possible.”¹¹ Richard and Ben Crampton believe that Belarus “has little sense of nationhood and little experience in practical politics,” stressing the fact that “there was no church with which Belarusians could associate” in their establishing of a distinct identity.¹² Dawisha and Parrot insist: “Belarus has a shortage of ingredients critical to the construction of a durable nation-state: a vigorous sense of its distinctive national identity. [...] The Belarusian case demonstrates the difficulty of basing a new state on a conception of the nation as a sovereign people when the core population’s sense of ethnic distinctiveness is comparatively undeveloped.”¹³

From this perspective, existence of an independent Belarusian state seems an exceptional case. As Thomas Winderl writes, “True enough, Belarus still exists as a sovereign state. But Belarus is definitely an example where an attempt to establish a strong national identity failed within a short period of time.”¹⁴ This view on the existing Belarusian state as “not a national one” is shared by Polish sociologist Ryszard Radzik: “The Soviet state has created Belarusian society in its present form. However, it did not create the Belarusian nation, as well as the nation did not build the state (as the major part of the population was not ‘nationalized’).”¹⁵ About the existing Belarusian state R. Radzik writes, that it “is not a realization of the

9 Ed Jocelyn, “Nationalism, Identity and the Belarusian State,” in *National Identities and Ethnic Minorities in Eastern Europe*, ed. Ray Taras (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 73–83.

10 Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh, “Introduction. Paradoxes of Democratization in Contemporary Belarus,” 9.

11 Michalisko, “Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism,” 224.

12 Richard Crampton and Ben Crampton, *Atlas of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), 223.

13 K. Dawisha and B. Parrot, *Russian and the New States of Eurasia: The Politics of Upheaval* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 75.

14 Winderl, *Nationalism, Nation and State*, 94.

15 Radzik, “Belarus’ i Siarednie-Uskhodniaia Europa,”
http://kamunikat.org/k_pieraklady.html?pub_start=90&pubid=2352.

national meta-myth, [not] an idea of the national-liberation struggle, [and not a] tension of civil emotions.”¹⁶

In his *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, Timothy Snyder uses Belarusians as an example of a “national failure.” “Here we have an ‘ethnic group,’” writes Snyder, “which is the largest by far in the area in question. According to the Russian imperial census of 1897, more people spoke Belarusian in Vilnius province than all other languages combined. In Vilnius, Minsk, Grodno, Mogilev, and Vitebsk provinces contiguous territories of historic Lithuania, speakers of Belarusian were three-quarters of the population. In the twentieth century, this “ethnic group” did not become a modern nation.”¹⁷

Belarusian authors also promote the thesis of a weak and unshaped character of the Belarusian nation. For them unrealized project of democratic Belarusian state is an unimplemented possibility of completing the construction of the Belarusian nation. A. Astapenka, deputy chairman of the BSDG (Belarusian Social Democratic Gramada) writes: “At the end of the twentieth century Belarusians have found themselves in the same situation as the French people at the end of the eighteenth century or the Czech people in the early twentieth century. Currently—at the time of developed national state—Belarusians are one of the few peoples in the world whose national identity has not formed yet. The basic features of a nation—a common language, territory, and national state—are not manifested in Belarus in the best possible way, and not without reason for a long time Belarusians were referred to as an ethnos, and not as a nation.”¹⁸ S. Dubavets reiterates: “Belarusians do not exist as a developed cultural nation. There are no grounds for them to assume ‘an equal position among [other] nations.’ It is an illusion to see Belarusians in the same ranks as Germans, Russians or even Lithuanians—in the same context of culture- and science-related issues.”¹⁹ Another Belarusian author, Ianov Poleskii, writes, “I believe, transformations in Belarus can actually take place if we manage to form a nation within a short period of time.”²⁰

16 Radzik, “Belarus’ i Siarednie-Uskhodniaia Europa.”

17 Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 41–42.

18 Anatol Astapenka, “Palitychnyia pratsesy na Belarusi u gistarychnai perspektyve i ikh uzaemasuviaz z natsiianal’nai ideai i natsiianalizmam,” *Adkrytaie gramadstva*, no. 2 (11) (2001), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/10.html>.

19 Siargei Dubavets, “Padstavy ratsiianal’naga natsiianalizmu,” in *Antalogia suchasnaga belaruskaga mys’lennia*, ed. V. Akudovich (Sankt-Petersburg: Nevskii Prostor 2003), 122–123.

20 Poleskii Ianov, “Bremia istoricheskogo tvorchestva,” *Nashe mnenie*, May 23, 2006, <http://www.nmnb.org/pub/060306/23-m1.html>

Although the above quotations touch on different aspects of Belarusian political and cultural life, the common denominator remains diagnostics of the state of the national consciousness as something weak and backward. Practically all of the above quotations deal with the nation to which the Belarusian nationalists and the BPF appealed in the early 1990s, the nation comprising “conscious” Belarusians who are ready to oppose themselves to the Soviet experience of Belarusianness. The defeat of the political nationalism in the early 1990s made it logical to conclude about the underdeveloped condition of the Belarusian nation. A number of concomitant factors are seen as critically important symptoms of this deficiency, such as the prospect of building the Union State with Russia, linguistic Russification, and overall lack of anti-Russian sentiment in society. The lack of religious unity among Belarusians is considered as one more reason for Belarusian identity’s weakness. Nevertheless, further narration will show that all these factors are far from being simplistically interrelated.

The Russian Factor in Belarusian Self-Perception

The integration project as a political undertaking and as a factor of mass consciousness is often considered as an evidence of Belarusians' reluctance to preserve their independence. "Escape into common destiny, which is manifested in the search of a state to be 'integrated' with, turns Belarus into an escape from destiny and responsibility, and, in the end, into 'escape from liberty',"¹ writes Belarusian political scientist Rouda. This is an escape from one's own independence and, by the same token, from implementation of the main national idea. ("Independence is the very existence of a nation," says the chief ideologist of the BPF Z. Pazniak.)²

Such an interpretation of the integration project stems from Russia's image as an "outsider" on Belarusian territory, which the latter is prepared to join, thus losing its independence. In this case one can speak in reality of a pathological dependence of Belarus (and its readiness to depend) on an "outside" and alien political and cultural formation—Russia. "No nation or *ethnie* is exempt from external influences, and hardly any is immune to them. But what is truly unusual about Belarus is the degree to which external factors control every fiber in its national fabric, every facet of Belarus's ethno-national setting: the economy, politics and indeed language and identity."³ This external factor, controlling every fiber of the "Belarusian soul" is Russia.

The Russian issue in the Belarusian context falls into at least three separate issues. First, it is a nostalgic sentiment of the population that was especially evident in the political choices during the first years of independence. Indeed, in the early and mid-1990s the project of a new integration

1 Uladzimer Rouda, "Natsional'naia ideia kak faktor stanovleniia grazhdanskogo obshchestva," *Analitika Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsent NGO*, 2004, http://iac.unibel.by/anl_na0040.htm.

2 Zianon Pazniak, "Nezalezhnasts' geta iosts' isnavan'ne natsyi" BPF, <http://www.pbpf.org/art.php?art=34&cat=4&lang=be>.

3 Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape," 110.

with Russia in public consciousness was actually a modernized variety of the USSR. And among the post-Soviet populations, the Belarusian citizens were known as the greatest proponents of the old state restoration. In the March 1991 referendum the Belarusian electorate expressed the highest level of loyalty to the Soviet Union compared to the other participating Soviet republics. Almost 83 percent voted in favor of preserving the Soviet Union. (In Russia and Ukraine the rates were 71.3 percent and 70.2 percent, respectively.) However, by the end of the 1990s the idea of “the Union State” was transformed in public consciousness into an entirely new self-contained project. A comparison of the data of the opinion polls conducted by the IISEPS between 1993 and 2006 shows that the number of those in Belarus who support the idea of reviving the USSR declined over time (see Table 1). As a result, in 2006 it was down to 26 percent, which practically coincides with the number of senior citizens in the country.

TABLE 1. *Responses to the Question*
“How do you feel about restoration of the USSR?” (%)

	November 1993	November 1997	November 1999	April 2002	June 2004	December 2005	April 2006
Negative	22.3	25.5	30.1	42.6	50.8	48.3	63.4
Positive	55.1	49.9	38.0	38.8	39.5	38.0	26.7
No answer	22.6	24.6	31.9	18.6	9.7	13.7	9.9

Note: National opinion poll conducted by independent sociologists, April 15–29, 2006. 1,594 people were polled, age 18 and older.

Source: Bulletin “Novosti IISEPS” no. 2 (40) (2006), <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet06-2.html>.

However, the trend of attitude toward the Union with Russia looks different. The rate of Belarusians’ interest in reunification with Russia remains high, although it shows some decline of the project’s popularity (see Table 2). Notably, the number of those who think that Belarus and Russia should become a single state decreased from 20 percent in 2002 to 12 percent in 2005. At the same time, the number of those who think that Belarus and Russia should form an independent union state connected with close political and economic relations between the two states was still more than 50 percent.

TABLE 2. Responses to the Question "What version of Belarus and Russia integration would you personally Prefer?" (%)

	December 2002	March 2003	November 2004	September 2005	December 2005
Belarus and Russia should form an independent union state connected with close political and economic relations	51.7	48.0	47.8	50.6	52.3
Relations of Belarus with Russia should be similar to those with other CIS countries	19.7	19.3	32.1	28.9	20.7
Belarus and Russia should become a single state with a common president, government, army, flag, currency, etc.	21.2	25.6	11.6	13.2	12.0
No answer	7.4	7.1	8.5	7.3	15.0

Note: National opinion poll conducted by independent sociologists, April 15–29, 2006; 1,594 people were polled, age 18 and older.

Source: Bulletin "Novosti IISEPS" no. 2 (40) (2006), <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet06-2.html>.

In 2006–7 the situation changed. As opinion polls conducted by IISEPS during that time showed, the number of those who in case of a referendum about the unification of Belarus and Russia would vote in its favor declined from 46.4 percent in November 2006 to 35.1 percent in January 2007. For the first time, the number of those who would vote against the Union (39.3%) was higher than those in favor.⁴

Nevertheless, the general orientation of Belarusians' geopolitical preferences toward Russia remains dominant in case they have to choose between "the West" and "the East." When asked to select between the unification with Russia and joining the European Union, the respondents were divided in their preferences: in 2003, 47.5 percent favored Russia, while 36.1 percent favored the European Union; in 2005—51.6 percent and

4 "Povorotnyi punkt integratsii," *Nowosti IISEPS Bulletin* no. 1 (2007), <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet07-1.html>.

24.8 percent; in 2006—56.3 percent and 27.5 percent; and in 2007—48.5 percent and 33.6 percent.⁵

There is an economic reasoning behind the pro-Russian orientation of Belarusians. It states that the Union with Russia is the main, if not the only, condition for the Belarusian economy's development. Partially this statement can be accounted for due to the post-Soviet mentality preserved in the public consciousness. The dismemberment of the Soviet Union was followed by an economic decline, though in this respect Belarus was no exception among post-Soviet republics. But as Clelia Rontoyanni wrote, "perhaps more than in any other country in the region, in Belarus the decline was seen as a direct result of the disruption of interrepublican trade and overall disintegration of the Soviet economic space."⁶ This decline laid down a nostalgic framework for the new Union as there appeared to be a striving to turn back on the path to former stability and prosperity. (According to a national survey conducted by Novak Institute in early 2000, 68 percent of respondents expected that unification would enable a significant improvement in the economic performance of both countries, reduced unemployment, and higher standards of living.⁷) The economic strategy chosen by the Belarusian government counted not only on reduced prices in energy supplies, but also in equal measure on the Russian market for Belarusian industrial output. The thesis about the economic need for Belarus to integrate with Russia was constantly promulgated by the official rhetoric until the end of 2006 when the Russian authorities limited their financial support to the Belarusian economy.

The economic factors of the Russian–Belarusian relations can be considered as secondary, because in reality the "Russian vector in Belarus's political life is grounded first of all in people's mentality and socio-cultural factors,"⁸ as noted by Nesvetailova. According to the survey by the Moscow-based Center for Sociological Research, 77 percent of Belarusian respondents supported integration on the grounds that "Russians and Belarusians are historically one people, they are spiritually close, and have

5 "Spasitel' russkoi tsivilizatsii pridet s zapada," *Arkhiv analitiki IISEPS* (May 2008), <http://www.iiseps.org/12-05-08.html>.

6 Clelia Rontoyanni, "Belarus and the East," in *Postcommunist Belarus*, ed. S. White, E. Korosteleva, and J. Löwenhardt (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 124.

7 "*Belarus' i Swet*" (Minsk: Novak, 2000).

8 Anastasia Nesvetailova, "Russia and Belarus. The Quest for the Union; or Who Will Pay for Belarus' Path to Recovery?" in *Contemporary Belarus*, ed. E. Korosteleva, C. Lawson, and R. Marsh (London–New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 153.

similar languages, cultures, and traditions.”⁹ During another nationwide representative opinion poll conducted in March 2000 in Belarus respondents were asked to give a cultural definition of Belarusians and say whether they are “a separate self-sustained (*samastoinaia*) nation” or “a branch of the triune Russian nation,” or “other.” Only 49.8 percent said that Belarusians are a separate nation, while 42.6 percent chose the second answer, with 2.1 percent pointing at Russian roots; 5.5 percent did not know how to answer.¹⁰ The main problem for Belarus is that Russia is not perceived as an “outside” subject, but as an “internal” and integral part of Belarusianness. The Belarusian writer Akudovich once noted that “Russia is not *to* the East of Belarusian lands, Russia *is* the east of Belarus. It means that Russia by means of its certain contour (just like Europe) is naturally situated inside our own selfness.”¹¹ Hence the problem that “Many Belarusians still cannot think of themselves as a self-sustained nation, [...] as an entity apart from Russia.”¹²

Thus it can be logically assumed that the implementation of its own national ambitions for the Belarusian people lies in a new framework of their attitude toward Russia. As Ryszard Radzik writes, “Formation of the Belarusian people can currently take place only within an opposition to Russianness.”¹³ The political agenda of the Belarusian nationalist forces was built on such opposition, and it failed. However, the implementation of the emphasized pro-Russian political strategy by the Belarusian authorities led to unanticipated results. Despite the Belarusian president’s declarations that Belarusians favor the idea of a Soviet-like union, an increasing number of Belarusians would consider unification with Russia only if Belarus preserved its status of an independent state. A mere 12 percent of those who prefer to unite with Russia into a common state, indicates this idea’s unpopularity.

Thus, against the background of the rhetoric about unification, and the perception of Russianness as an integral part of Belarusianness, in Belarus-

9 Unpublished survey conducted by the Moscow-based Center for Sociological Research in Russian and Belarus, April–May 1999. Cited in Rontoyanni, “Belarus and the East,” 134.

10 Andrei Vardamatski, “Belarus’ i Swet,” *Belaruskaja perspektywa* no. 9 (2000): 7, cited in Zaprudnik, “Belarus: in Search of National Identity,” 115.

11 Valiantsin Akudovich, “My i Rasieia,” in *Dialogi z Bogam* (Minsk: Izd. I. P. Logvinov, 2006), 31.

12 Zaprudnik, “Belarus: In Search of National Identity,” 112.

13 Ryszard Radzik, “Formowanie się nowoczesnej polskości i białoruskości w dwóch ostatnich stuleciach: podobieństwa i różnice,” *Acta Albaruthenica* 2. (2001): 187.

ians' consciousness a disengagement of Belarusian state from that of Russia has taken place. In practice, it appeared, as the Russian researcher F. Lukyanov writes, "the decades of history of Union relations was not a period of unification of two 'brotherly peoples' but, on the contrary, adaptation of the neighboring country to a truly independent existence, no matter in what extravagant form."¹⁴ According to another Russian author, Ya. Shimov, "despite the 'imperial image' of Russia among the Belarusian nationalist elite, it played a positive role in the shaping of Belarusians' 'original nature' (*samost*), while Russia played the role of 'the significant Other,' which served as a kind of a reference point, but from which one alienated in order to preserve one's own identity and values."¹⁵

14 Fedor Lukianov, "Belorussia kotoruiu my ne ponimaem," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* no. 47, 2006, <http://www.nz-online.ru/index.phtml?aid=80011754>.

15 Yaroslav Shimov, "Belorussia: Vostochnoevropeiskii paradoks," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* no. 3, 2006, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2006/47/sh11.html>.

The Paradox of “National Pride”

The concept of “national pride” is part of a wider context of beliefs, purposes, and emotions that form the national identity. As the Polish sociologist Zbigniew Bokszański writes, the national pride is “both an assessment of one’s own people and a satisfying effect caused by the realization of one’s belonging to the national community. Assessment of successes and failures of the people, together with the subjective cheerful feeling caused by the belonging to a nation is a result of appraisal, comparisons, and observations embedded in the individuals’ experience, connected with their native land’s destiny.”¹ From this perspective, “the national pride” is a definite form of individualization of the concept of national identity, which refers to the knowledge, ideas, and opinions of members of the national community. In this context, one can state, that the status of the country in the perception of its citizens is an evidence of the beginning of its independence. As opinion polls show, Belarusians are increasingly confirmed in their desire to live in their own independent state, where “Belarus” and “Belarusianness” become groundwork for self-determination. The IISEPS sociologists conducted an opinion poll where respondents were given a number of options of hypothetic self-definition (see Table 3).

The data show that the majority of those involved in the opinion poll opted to present themselves as citizens of Belarus. Remarkably, among those who consider themselves citizens of Belarus, there is a considerable number of ethnic Russians and representatives of other ethnic minorities, testifying to the fact that Belarusian society has a considerable assimilation power. (According to the census, ethnic Russians comprise 11 percent.) It is noteworthy that the replacement of ethnic identity by civic identity is characteristic of ethnic Belarusians, too—according to the census, they comprise 81 percent of the country’s population but only half of them prefer this kind of self-identification (see Table 3). Such data do not confirm the impression about a weak, eroded, indefinite Belarusian identity, as well as the opinion about the Belarusian nation as one “not shaped yet.”

1 Zbigniew Bokszański, *Tożsamości Zbiorowe* (Warsaw: PWN, 2005), 136.

TABLE 3. Responses to the question "What kind of an individual would you perceive yourself to be if you were asked about it abroad?" (%)

Citizen of Belarus	44.3
Belarusian	43.7
Russian	4.1
Citizen of the USSR	1.4
Representative of a different nationality (Tatar, Ukrainian, Jew, etc.)	1.3
Something different	1.8
Not sure	3.4

Note: National opinion poll conducted in November–December 2005 by independent sociologists assisted; 1,514 respondents were polled.

Source: "Grazhdanskaia identichnost'" *Novosti IISEPS Bulletin*' no. 4, 2005, <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet05-4.html>.

They, rather, testify to a paradoxically strong civic identity in the self-consciousness of Belarusian majority. Some researchers assume that these data disapprove the fears that in Belarusian society there are widely disseminated identities different from the civic and ethnic Belarusian affiliation.² This feeling of belonging to the nation defined by the state shows that the Belarusian nation proves to be quite a functioning link in the system of relations between society and the state.

Grigory Ioffe once wrote that "as a group, Belarusians seem at first glance to be uniquely selfless and immune to national pride."³ But this observation is refuted by the research cited in John Löwenhardt's article titled "Belarus and the West."⁴ He refers to the results of the research that was done in November 2001 by the New Democracy Barometer in several East European countries. Citizens were asked how proud they were of being citizens of their country (see Table 4); according to John Löwenhardt, this "can be seen as a way of measuring national identity."⁵

2 "Grazhdanskaia identichnost'" *Novosti IISEPS Bulletin*' no. 4, 2005, <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet05-4.html>.

3 Ioffe, "Understanding Belarus: Economy and Political Landscape," 111.

4 John Löwenhardt, "Belarus and the West," in *Postcommunist Belarus*, ed. S. White, E. Korosteleva, and J. Löwenhardt (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 143–59.

5 Löwenhardt, "Belarus and the West," 147.

TABLE 4. *Response to the Question “How proud are you to be a citizen of your country?” (%)*

	Belarus	Russia	Ukraine	Moldova
Very proud	28 (31)	22	14	16
Quite proud	38 (39)	41	34	47
Proud	66 (70)	62	48	63
Rather not proud	8 (7)	12	19	16
Not proud at all	6 (5)	9	15	8
Not proud	14 (12)	20	33	24
I do not care	12 (11)	10	10	4

Notes: Survey sponsored by the European Commission Directorate General Research within the framework of the INCO-COPERNICUS Research Program. Percentage in parenthesis refers to those who identify themselves as being of Belarusian nationality.

Source: adapted by John Löwenhardt from Christian Haerpfer, *New Democracy Barometer*, no. 6, November 2001. Löwenhardt “Belarus and the West,” in *Postcommunist Belarus*, ed. S. White, E. Korosteleva, and J. Löwenhardt (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 147.

The data reveal, Löwenhardt writes, that “in the hearts and minds of the Belarusian citizenry their country has definitely been put on the map,”⁶ as the “citizens of Belarus are the proudest in the region!”⁷ Of those who consider themselves to be of Belarusian nationality, seven in every ten are proud to be a citizen of their country.

The data of the large-scale international research conducted in 1995–98 by the World Values Survey⁸ reveals that in the late 1990s Belarusians, in respect of national pride among post-communist nations, were neither the first nor the last. For the indication of the “pride” the “Index of pride” was used: those who definitely are not proud of their Belarusian citizenship are attributed the zero rating, most likely not proud—1, most likely proud—2, definitely proud—3. Then, with the exception of those who did not respond, we calculate the meaning of the “Index of pride” of Belarusians: $(0.052 \cdot 0 + 0.151 \cdot 1 + 0.234 \cdot 2 + 0.426 \cdot 3) / (1.0 - 0.137) = 2.19$

6 Löwenhardt, “Belarus and the West,” 147.

7 Löwenhardt, “Belarus and the West,” 147.

8 In particular it considered to what degree citizens of twenty post-communist countries were proud of their countries, at the same time there was a separate study of the attitude to the country of residence on the part of ethnic minorities and title ethnies.

TABLE 5. *Pride Index by Country (1995–1998)*

Armenia (entire population)	2.2	Belarus (Belarusians)	2.1
Belarus (Poles)	2.0	Belarus (Ukrainians)	1.8
Belarus (Russians)	1.6	Bulgaria (Bulgarians)	2.4
Bulgaria (Turks)	2.0	Hungary (entire population)	2.3
Georgia (Georgians)	2.5	Georgia (Russians)	2.3
Latvia (Latvians)	2.4	Latvia (Russians)	1.2
Lithuania (Lithuanians)	1.8	Lithuania (Russians)	1.6
Lithuania (Poles)	1.2	Poland (entire population)	2.7
Russia (Russians)	2.0	Russia (Tatars)	1.8
Ukraine (Ukrainians)	2.1	Ukraine (Russians)	1.3
Yugoslavia (Serbs)	2.2	Yugoslavia (Montenegrins)	2.2

Source: www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

According to the above research, one cannot observe any “backwardness” of Belarusians in the respect of their country’s value for them. Their “pride index” values are quite comparable with those in other post-communist countries. The pride index of Belarusians in Belarus is practically equal to the similar index of Ukrainians, a little leaving behind Russia and Lithuania, and on the whole, among neighbors they are noticeably behind only Poles.

IISEPS sociologists also studied the ratio between “the pride index” of Belarusians and their political views, in particular, their attitude toward Lukashenka.

The data presented in Table 6 testify to a strong negative connection between the pride in Belarusian citizenship and the attitude toward President Lukashenka. His supporters to a much greater degree than his opponents are prone to the pride in their Belarusian citizenship. This appears to be a paradox, if we take into account that it is Lukashenka’s electorate that is viewed as an antinationalist force that brought the BPF to failure and that it comprises the “denationalized” Belarusian majority.

The results of another comparative study conducted by Polish sociologist A. Sadowski of a “set of values” as perceived by individuals from several countries—Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Romania—also show no

TABLE 6. *The relation between the level of pride of being a Belarusian citizen and the attitude toward Lukashenka (%)*

	Are you proud to be a Belarusian citizen?				Group pride index
	Definitely “yes” (42.6)	Most likely “yes” (23.4)	Most likely “no” (15.1)	Definitely “no” (5.2)	
Do you think there are people in Belarus who would govern the country better than Lukashenka?					
Yes (37.6)	33.1	24.5	23.0	9.0	1.91
No (35.9)	59.0	22.5	7.9	0.9	2.54
Imagine that in 2006 free and fair presidential election will take place, just like in 1994. Who will win?					
Lukashenka will be elected (55.0)	52.5	23.5	9.5	2.5	2.43
Another person will be elected (25.7)	29.7	26.5	24.8	10.1	1.82
Who will you vote for?					
For Lukashenka (40.7)	60.1	22.3	5.3	0.6	2.61
For a democratic opposition candidate (23.2)	27.9	21.9	29.6	11.9	1.72
For no one (19.0)	33.3	27.4	19.5	8.9	1.83

Note: National opinion poll conducted in May 2005 by IISEPS sociologists ; 1,510 respondents were polled.
Source: "Kab lubits' Belarus' nashu miluiiu," *Arkhiv analitiki IISEPS*, May 2005,
<http://www.iiseps.org/5-05-5.html>.

evidence that Belarusians lack national sentiment.⁹ Within the framework of the Sadowski's study, the list of values proposed for appraisal included national dignity, civil liberties, education, national unity, work for the mother-

9 A. Sadowski and M. Czerniawska, *Tożsamość polaków na pograniczach* (Białystok: Wydaw. Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 1999), 63–65.

land, professional success, religion, and friendly relations with other countries. Belarusians, as Sadowski's study shows, award the highest importance to civil liberties (62.79%), education (60.47%), national unity (55.81%), and national dignity (44.19%), religion polled only 26.74 percent,¹⁰ and "friendly relations with other countries" were the least valued at 13.95 percent.¹¹

Such data manifest that straightforward statement about a weak expression of the national sentiment and absence of Belarusian identity, despite their looking obvious for many researchers, are not indisputable: Belarusians stand up for the preservation of their country's independence, they prefer Belarusian identity and more than others, or at least no less, are proud of being citizens of their country.

10 These data also prove that the factor of religion cannot be considered as decisive in defining a model for the sociopolitical development of Belarus at the present time. During the Soviet period, religion was deprived of its leading status in cultural and social life, and had no influence on society comparable to what it had in Poland, for example. Although the Church re-entered the public life of Belarusian society after the fall of communism, its influence on people's social and political choices can hardly be seen as crucial.

11 The study was conducted in 1996 using questionnaires filled out by 235 people. Sadowski and Czerniawska, *Tożsamość polaków na pograniczach*, 51–54.

Paradoxes of Political and Linguistic Russification

One of the paradoxes of the Belarusian national development is related to the language issue. The numerical data testifying to the language Russification of the Belarusian cultural life do not cause any doubt that the Belarusian national culture and language are in a critical position.

Russification is a historically lengthy process in Belarus, with its roots going back to the Russian empire. At that time it was aimed at a complete elimination of Belarusianness and transformation of Belarusian lands into western Russian ones, and the Belarusians were considered as a regional group of the great Russian nation (conception of the so-called *Zapadnorusizm*—Western Russism). Under the Soviet rule Russification had a different character. As Yekadumau writes, “In relation to the Soviet era, it would be more accurate to speak about Sovietization—the formation of a specific Soviet culture, which the Russian language served, than Russification.”¹ Nevertheless, the promotion of sovietness by means of the Russian language had led to a high level of linguistic Russification of the Belarusian public and cultural life. The policy of Russification, officially introduced under Stalin, had an impressive effect: by the mid-1970s not a single Belarusian-language school remained in the republic’s ninety-five cities. In 1984 only some 5 percent of journals in circulation were published in Belarusian. Only about one-third of the population spoke Belarusian in their daily life, and these were concentrated among rural inhabitants.² During perestroika, numerous efforts were made to return the Belarusian language into public and cultural life, including political decisions and shifts in cultural life. Finally, perestroika in Belarus brought about possibilities to restrict Russification.

In June 1989 the Fratsishak Skaryna Society of the Belarusian language³ was founded in Minsk. It was a time of intense public discussions in

1 Andrei Yekadumau, “The Russian Factor in the Development of Belarusian Culture,” in *Belarus-Russia Integration*, ed. V. Bulgakau (Minsk–Warsaw: Analytical group Minsk, 2003), 186–87.

2 Marples, *Belarus. A Denationalized Nation*, 50.

3 Tavarystva Belaruskai movy imia Fratsishka Skaryny, <http://tbn.org.by>.

newspapers, journals, and the electronic media, which raised the level of popular awareness of the language issue in cultural life. The Belarusian language appeared in educational institutions, on television and the radio—all this was taking shape of a common process of “the return to everything Belarusian.” In January 1990 the Supreme Soviet adopted the law “On languages in the BSSR.” In September 1990 the Belarusian government sanctioned a national program on the development of the Belarusian language and the languages of other nationalities in the BSSR, thereby ratifying a decree that established Belarusian as the state language of the Republic.⁴ In 1992 Deputy Minister of Education Vasil Strazhau announced that the language to be in all pedagogical schools would be Belarusian and 55 percent of first graders would be taught in Belarusian. Notably, he forecast that in ten years the entire Belarusian system of education would shift to the Belarusian language.

These plans, however, were reversed after the 1994 political climate change. Developments in Belarus after Lukashenka’s coming to power made it a unique Soviet republic where political independence led to a step toward further Russification. While during the Soviet rule Russification was an instrument of Sovietization of cultural and public life, this time “the policy of the Belarusian authorities after 1991–1995 was directed not so much at Russification as at the de-Belarusification, fighting against the national self-awareness of the Belarusians as a factor that threatens the stability of the Lukashenka regime.”⁵ Russification was not a purpose in itself, it was simply a means to attain a definite political task. This time Russian returned not as a language of intercultural communication in the expanses of the Soviet State (the Russification logic in the Soviet times), but as a language of the independent Belarusian state. This was immediately reflected in the change of educational and cultural policy.

The number of first graders being taught in Belarusian declined from 58.6 percent in 1994 to 4.8 in 1998, in Minsk alone. No higher education institution in Belarus taught in the Belarusian language. By 2001 most big cities had no schools where the language of instruction was Belarusian. The best situation was in Minsk—twelve Belarusian-language schools operated in the city.⁶ A similar picture of the intense trend of de-Belarusification

4 “Gosudarstvennaia programma razvitiia belorusskogo iazyka i drugikh natsionalnykh iazykov v Belorusskoi SSR” (“The state program of development of the Belarusian language and other national languages in the Belarusian SSR), *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, September 25, 1990.

5 Yekadumau, “The Russian Factor in the Development of Belarusian Culture,” 218.

6 Yekadumau, “The Russian Factor in the Development of Belarusian Culture,” 218.

could be observed in printed media. Only 10.5 percent of all single-circulation newspapers appear in the native language, and, from the perspective of Belarusian speakers, the situation deteriorates each year.⁷ At first glance, the logic of these developments is another argument in favor of the thesis about the weakness of the Belarusian national idea. The refusal to use Belarusian in public life is an indication of the decline of Belarusian culture, and from the most pessimistic viewpoint it predicts its possible elimination under the aegis of the great Russian tradition. Such a conclusion, however, faces at least two paradoxes.

According to the 1999 census data, published in 2001, the situation with the use of the Belarusian language in Belarus did not look so threatening. The majority of Belarusians called Belarusian their native language (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. *Use of the Russian and Belarusian languages among Belarusians and Russians living in the Republic of Belarus*

	Native language (percent)		Language spoken at home	
	Belarusian	Russian	Belarusian	Russian
Total population (10,045,237)	73.3	24.1	36.7	62.8
Belarusians (8,159,073)	85.6	14.3	41.3	58.6
Russians (1,141,731)	9.1	90.7	4.3	95.7

Source: Adapted from Yekadumau, "The Russian Factor in the Development of Belarusian Culture," in *Belarus-Russia Integration*, 217.

Only one-fifth of ethnic Belarusians spoke Belarusian according to the 1989 Soviet census. But from 1989 to 1999 the number of Belarusians who consider the Belarusian language their native language increased by more than half a million (the Belarusian population grew by 250,000 people). Thus, according to the 1999 census, more than two-fifth of ethnic Belarusians spoke Belarusian in their daily life, while in 1889—only one-fifth. In other words, during the ten years following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and while on the crest of a new wave of Russification (or de-Belarusification) the country experienced an increase in the number of Belarusian-speakers.

7 David Marples, "Changes proposed to Belarusian language," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* no. 3 (166) 2006, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=32027](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=32027).

The ambiguous position of the Belarusian language in the practice of Belarusian people's life is reflected in the theoretical concept of Belarusianness expressed by some historians working in state education system. Loika, one of the authors of the definitive Belarusian history textbook, writes: "While taking into account the dramatic character of the Belarusian history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries associated with the tearing our Fatherland between Warsaw and St. Petersburg, between Catholicism and Orthodox faith, we should not abjure our ancestors' achievements. There is no sense in considering only texts written in Belarusian to be "national." There is no ground in granting our neighbors or anyone else the Belarusian cultural values created in Polish, Russian, and Latin [languages]. In general, Belarus both in the remote past and today, has been having polyethnic and polylinguistic character."⁸

Another paradox of the last "wave of Russification" is connected with the growing contradiction between the linguistic and the political Russification of Belarusian minds. As opinion polls show, those who use the Russian language are not necessarily pro-Russian in their political preferences; that is, one needs to distinguish the linguistic and the political Russification. Jan Zaprudnik noted, "Russian in Belarus in many cases is as much a language of cultural renewal of the country and its independence as Belarusian."⁹ Different studies show that the majority of supporters of Lukashenka's policy and of the reintegration with Russia live in rural areas, and paradoxically, are Belarusian speaking. On the contrary, the Russian-speaking Minsk has become a center of political activism in defense of Belarus's independence. The research of the dependence between the political orientation and the spoken languages conducted by the IISEPS sociologists, manifests that "contrary to the widespread ideas, namely Russian speakers, in comparison with other language communities, are to a greater extent committed to the independence of Belarus and the economic liberty values and are least supportive of A. Lukashenka."¹⁰ A sociological picture of the opponents to President Lukashenka's policy aimed at the reunification with Russia characterizes him as "a young educated Minsker, actively engaged in entrepreneurship, who speaks Russian, supports Belarus's inde-

8 Pavel Loika, "Pramblemy gistarycznai adukatsyi u Belarusi. Gistarycznaia adukatsyia—asnova idealogii belaruskaga dziazhaunaga patryatyizmu," *Gistryczny almanach* no. 4 (2001), http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/almanach/04/04prab_lojka.htm.

9 Zaprudnik, "Belarus: in Search of National Identity," 117.

10 Dovedet li iazyk do Kieva," *Novosti IISEPS Bulletin*, 4, (2004), <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet04-4.html>.

pendence and is West-oriented.”¹¹ In other words, as Yuri Drakhohurst writes, “The Belarusian nationalism speaks Russian.”¹²

The contradiction between the linguistic Russification and the parallel “political Belarussification” of the public awareness in Belarus leads to a paradoxical fact: Russian-speaking Belarusians keep a distance in relation to Russia and are West-oriented. This fact, if does not disaffirm completely, at least diminishes the significance of the linguistic Russification in the context of the Belarusian national development.

11 Oleg Manaev, “Elektorat Aleksandra Lukashenko,” in *Belorussia i Rossia: Obshchestva i gosudarstva*, ed. D. Furman (Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 1998), 289.

12 Yu. Drakhohurst, “Belorusskii natsionalizm govorit po russki,” *Belorusskaia Delovaia Gazeta*, January 19, 1998.

*Lack of Religious Basis for
National Unity*

In Belarus, traditionally, Eastern Orthodoxy is identified—either subconsciously or explicitly—as the Russian faith, while Catholicism is seen as the Polish creed. During the first years of Belarusian independence, these old clichés inherited from history were reanimated. This means that religion does not seem to be a uniting factor in Belarus: Belarusians have been divided between different branches of Christianity, which serve to link Belarusians with either Russian or Polish religious community. Statistics reveal that the majority of Belarusians belong to Orthodoxy, followed by Catholicism; there is also a considerable number of Protestants as well as members of other religious groups. The Belarusian state equally recognizes both Orthodox and Catholic main religious holidays. In 2006 there were 1,349 Orthodox parishes registered in the country, 932 Protestant parishes, and 438 Roman Catholic ones. At the same time one should admit that the new epoch of independence has brought changes in the politics of faith. Belarusian authorities closely cooperate with the Orthodox Church, and refer to the Orthodox faith as genuine Belarusian tradition. Kazimir Świątek, the first cardinal in post-communist Belarus and the head of the Belarusian Catholic Church favored introduction of the Belarusian language into religious service, and prohibited the display of Polish national symbols in Belarus's Catholic churches. From the perspective of nation-building a problem remained with the Catholic clergymen of Polish origin who did not separate the concepts Catholicism and Polishness. At the same time the official policy of Vatican was aimed at an independent development of Belarus. Radio Vatican has been broadcasting in Belarusian language since the 1950s. Pope John Paul II had used the Belarusian language and demonstrated his support of Belarusianness. The policy of the Catholic Church conducted in the 1990s resulted in accepting the Belarusian language as a working language in Belarusian Catholicism. Books and magazines are published in Belarusian, and basic religious texts are translated into Belarusian, as well as prayers and songs. The Catholic clergy most often use the Belarusian language. The Orthodox clergy use

the Church Slavonic language in religious services, but they use Russian in all the other communications.

The attempts to revive the Greek Catholic Church were connected with the spiritual search of Belarusian intelligentsia and with the idea of the national church where the divine service and the cult could be united with the national symbols, traditions and the language. Ideas of the Uniate Church experienced a revival. The political scene saw such pro-Uniate politicians, as, for example, the leader of the Belarusian Popular Front Zianon Pazniak. Nevertheless, the idea pronounced by some authors about the necessity to welcome a development of the Uniate Church as a national Belarusian religion¹ had a small chance to be realized in practice, as the “Uniates” comprise a small group. There were only thirteen Uniate parishes registered in Belarus in 2006; they all had few members and were often adjoined to the Catholic Church.

The Soviet policy conducted in Belarus was aimed at the deindigenization of the population, when after graduating from colleges and universities young people were sent to “alien lands:” from the east of the country to the west, and vice versa. On the one hand, this was conducive to loss of contacts with the birthplace and its traditions, including religion. On the other hand, it contributed to confusion of traditions, to erasing and replacing them with common Soviet social rituals and practices.

The obvious domination of Orthodoxy in the post-communist Belarusian society shown by statistics is in practice dissolved by Catholicism also because of the latter’s cultural and educational activities conducted by the Catholic Church. Research proves that in the western part of the country, where the majority of Catholics reside, the religious aspect is stronger expressed and more often used as a guideline in social life.² Partially it can be explained by the fact that the ban on religion and the forced propaganda of atheism here continued just forty, not seventy years as in eastern Belarus. The counteraction to pro-Polish Catholicism comes from the local clergy and from believers. This milieu actively shapes the idea of Belarusian patriotism of Catholics and works toward the revival of national

1 Leonid Lych writes: “Attempts to revive Uniate Church in present time should get support among the self-conscious Belarusians, because Orthodox Church and Catholicism are practically not involved in the process of our national cultural resurgence” (L. Lych, “Religia i natsiianalnaia sviadomast’ belarusau,” *Belarusika Albaruthenica* no. 2 (1992), 68.

2 A. V. Danilov and V. A. Martinovich., “Osobennosti konfessionalnoi struktury Respubliki Belarus’,” in *Poskommunisticheskaia Belarus’ v protsesse religioznykh transformatsii*, ed. A. V. Danilov (Minsk: Adukatsia i vykhavanne, 2002), 7.

culture. "One can observe a high level of patriotism among young people, with their intention "to civilize Belarus and join Europe." In their opinion, "the Orthodox Church, with its pro-Russianness [...] just prevents it."³

All together these factors hamper active instrumentalization of the religion in nationalist discourses, and at the same time point out Belarusian religious tolerance and the tradition of peaceful coexistence of different religious communities on the Belarusian lands as one more appearance of the genuine Belarusian Europeanness.

3 V. V. Serdiuk, "Rimo-katoliki Belarusi. 1991–2001," in *Poskommunisticheskaia Belarus' v protsesse religioznykh transformatsii*, 31.

Two Ideas of “Belarusianness”

The underdeveloped character of the Belarusian nation and the weakness of the Belarusians' national self-consciousness is perceived as the main reason for the defeat of the nationalist movement and for the failure of the country's democratization. The linguistic Russification is considered to be a symptom of the progressing assimilation and dissolution of the Russian-speaking cultural universe. A hypothetic consent to a political union with Russia signifies a refusal of state independence. Each of these factors, however, has a flip side. The majority of Belarusians are in favor of integration with their eastern neighbor; but only 12 percent would want to create a single state with Russia. The linguistic Russification in practice does not lead to a political pro-Russianness; rather it is the Belarusian-speaking population that manifests a greater readiness to integrate with Russia. Russian-speaking people in Belarus still call the Belarusian language their native mother tongue. Belarusians do not always differentiate themselves from Russians in terms of cultural identity, but at the same time they manifest a high level of “the pride index” of their Belarusianness. Moreover, those members of society that comprises “the denationalized majority”—that is, the supporters of the current regime—demonstrate their Belarusian identity as an object of pride and as the main principle for their self-definition. In other words, the complicated layout of the political, cultural, and linguistic components of the Belarusians' self-awareness does not fit the simplistic image of a weak and underdeveloped Belarusian identity.

One of the ways to solve these paradoxes is to accept that there are two different ideas of “Belarusianness,” two conflicting concepts of Belarus, to which the Belarusian regime and political opposition appeal. It would mean to acknowledge that those who support the current regime are not nationless inhabitants, but rather the adherents of the Belarusian idea represented by the official discourse. At the same time, the concept of the alternative Belarusianness articulated by the Belarusian nationalist movement was constructed as a counter idea to the official Belarusianness and became groundwork for their political ideology.

Both ideas came to being as a result of different approaches to the development of the Belarusians' history. The idea of Belarusianness represented by the official discourse is built on the basis of continuity with the Soviet past and in some aspects it is connected with the ideas of the Belarussian revival of the early twentieth century (e.g., ideas of social equality as the ground for national unity). For the Belarussian nationalist movement of the 1990s, the national revival became the main source when articulating the concept of an alternative Belarusianness as opposed to the Soviet development of the nation. Both the official and the alternative discourses aspire to generalize and "globalize" their way of representation of Belarusianness, both of them are declared to be the only true "Belarussian idea." And in both cases the Belarussian "Motherland" appears as an "indivisible" ideological entity. To a certain extent, this can be seen as logical because, the national interest excludes particularity, because it implies the "wholeness" of the nation.¹ In the developments taking place in the Belarussian political space one can discern numerous signs of the symbolic struggle for the right to represent the true Belarusianness. On the one hand, the Belarussian authorities mark the territory of their legitimization in terms of unity —Belarussian people, Belarussians. In fact, the manipulations in which the regime engages during presidential elections are required not to change the final outcome, but rather to modify the view of the Belarussian society's political landscape. According to independent poll data, during the 2001 presidential election 49.8 percent of voters acknowledged that they supported Lukashenka, while 25.8 percent voted for the opposition's candidate, Vladimir Goncharik.² But according to the official data, these numbers were 75.65 percent for Lukashenka and 15.65 percent for Goncharik.³ In 2006 the picture looked similar: the official results announced by the Central Election Commission showed that 83 percent voted in favor of the current president, while 6.1 percent in favor of his opponent, Alaksandar Milinkevich.⁴ The Independent Institute of Socio-economic and Political Studies opinion poll results showed that 58.2 per-

1 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 221.

2 "Belarus': Perspektivy w XXI wiekie," *Novosti IISEPS Bulletin'*, no. 4, December 2001, <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet01-4.html>.

3 "Vybory Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus' 2001 god," Tsentralnaia Komisia Respubliki Belarus' po vyboram i provedeniiu referendumov, 2001, <http://www.rec.gov.by/elect/prb2001/prb2001res.html>.

4 "Svedeniia ob itogakh vyborov prezidenta Respubliki Belarus'," Tsentralnaia Komisia Respubliki Belarus' po vyboram i provedeniiu referendumov, 2001, <http://www.rec.gov.by/elect/prrb2006/itog.html>.

cent of the questioned voted for Lukashenka, and 15.8 percent for Alaksandar Milinkevich.⁵ The comparison of the independent opinion poll data and the Central Election Commission data indicate that the results of voting are not falsified to the point of changing the "winner." By citing lower percentage of those who support opposition candidates, the authorities create a view of the Belarusian nation as unified and cohesive, thus locating the opposition out of the space of this "integral wholeness." At the same time, the authorities have purposefully carried out the monopolization of the public sphere pushing the "third sector," political parties, and non state-owned press off to the margins of public life. Their activity is not banned, but limited and restricted, and they are denied the right to speak on behalf of Belarusian people and Belarus. According to a 2004 presidential decree, privately owned Belarusian media were not allowed to use the words "national" or "Belarus" in their names. The striving for the homogeneity of the Belarusian public space is also displayed in the response of the authorities to the street actions organized by political opposition. In most cases, such demonstrations are not banned, but nearly always their location is changed by the authorities. Instead of allowing the demonstrators to gather in centrally located squares and avenues, the events are moved to remote parts of the city, which are harder to reach and where these actions are secluded from the passersby. This relocation of the opposition's meetings to the peripheries of Minsk symbolizes their exclusion from the center of the official public life.

Belarus is known as a country whose public space is free of commercial advertising. However, it is full of the so-called social advertising, in which the state presents and promotes itself to its citizens with the motto "For Belarus." For the first time this slogan was used in 2004 to push for constitutional reforms in the country. The campaign was announced and promoted on TV, during public concerts, and on posters and billboards. Different adjectives were added to the slogan in order to specify the "desirable vision" of the official Belarus: "For prosperous Belarus," "For genuine Belarus," "For enlightened Belarus," "For talented Belarus," "For heroic Belarus," "For Olympic Belarus," "For stability," "For independence." This campaign was also used in the 2006 presidential elections, with the addition of a song played on Belarusian state television on the day of the elections. In 2007 the campaign "For independent Belarus" was launched aimed at promoting official Belarusianness. Meanwhile, the opposition's political

5 "Ukrepnenie proevropeiskikh orientatsii v Belarusi," *Novosti IISEPS Bulletin*, no. 2, December 2006, <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet06-2.html>.



Official poster “For Independent Belarus!” February 14, 2007. *Source:* Belapan.

and cultural discourses refer to the official Republic of Belarus as an anti-Belarusian political formation. “The independent state—the Republic of Belarus—actually is not a national state. Since 1994 the current regime has done everything to eliminate everything that is national here.”⁶ The position of the Belarusian nation in Belarus is defined by some Belarusian authors as “the position of a national minority that suffers from the policy of discrimination and enslavement.”⁷ As a cultural project, the Belarusian nation “remained at the level of subculture, one of many competitive programs of modernization of Belarus.”⁸ The antagonism between the contemporary Belarusian state and the Belarusian nation reached its climax in the Belarusian People’s Front’s statement adopted in 2003 by the Soym of the Conservative Christian Party—Belarusian people’s Front (CCP-BPF). “On the ethnocide and elimination of the the Belarusian nation,”⁹ of which the authorities of the Republic of Belarus are accused. The Belarusian nation,

6 Uladzimir Rouda, “Gramadzianskaia natsiiionalnaia idea i demokratychnaia perspektyva Belarusi,” *Analitika Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr* 2000, http://iac.unibel.by/anl_na0030.htm.

7 Uladzimir Rouda, “Ia ne dumaiu chto nam nado otkazatsia ot idei sozdaniia natsionalnogo gosudarstva,” *Adkrytaie gramadstva*, no. 2, 2001, <http://www.data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/2.html>.

8 Ihar Babkou, “Etyka pamezzha, transkulturalizm iak Belaruskii dos’ved,” in *Antalogia suchasnaga belaruskaga myslen’nia*, ed. Akudovich and A. Antsipenka (St. Petersburg: Nevskii Prostor, 2003), 75–76.

9 Conservative Christian Party (BPF), www.pbpf.org.

according to the opposition, is set against the Belarusian state. Opposition politicians behave as if there were no Belarusians at all among those supporting the governing regime. The opposition claimed that the nation in Belarus has nothing in common with the existing state. The article about the Assembly of Belarusian Intelligentsia held on March 16, 2003 and organized by the opposition in Minsk was titled “Belarusian Intelligentsia Says ‘No’ to the Ruling Regime.” March 25—the day of annual celebration of the establishment of the Belarusian People’s Republic in 1918—was announced by the Belarusian opposition in 2007 to be a “Day of National Unity.” On March 25, 2007, the day the opposition planned an annual street demonstration, the authorities launched their campaign “For independent Belarus.”

One manifestation of the struggle between the two discourses of Belarusianness has become the celebration of St. Valentine’s day. Every February 14 since 1997 the youth political organization Malady Front (Young Front) conducts street political actions under the slogan “I love Belarus.”

No one doubts that “Belarus” “loved” by these young people and “Belarus” presented by the official posters are two different Belaruses. As a rule, the Young Front gets no permission from the authorities to conduct its actions, thus their actions are perceived by the government as an

Official action “For beloved Belarus” organized by the Belarusian Republican Youth Union on St. Valentine’s Day, 2007. *Source:* Belapan.





"I love Belarus" street action organized by the Young Front in Minsk. February 14, 2007. *Source:* Belapan.

attempt of a symbolical "appropriation" of "Belarusian motherland," which had been already usurped by the official discourse. Despite the official ban, the political "actions of love" continue to be conducted in Minsk by the Young Front. Because the ban is obviously not working, the authorities have decided to organize their own actions of manifestation of their "love" for Belarus.

Thus, on February 14, 2007, Belarus saw a true political struggle in the field of declaration of love for the Belarusian motherland. Parallel to the opposition's action "I love Belarus," the official youth organization *Belaruski Respublikanski Saiuz Maladiozhy* (Belarusian Republican Youth Union) conducted the action "For beloved Belarus."

The thesis about two parallel concepts of *Belarusianness* allows us to interpret the interrelations between democratization and nationalization of Belarusian society in a different way. In this perspective, the national weakness of *Belarusianness* can become its antipode—a special "strength," which makes it possible to render resistance to the systemic transformations that have gripped the entire geopolitical space around Belarus.

Belarusian-Specific Nature of the Public Sphere: “Invisible Wall”

The Polish political scientist E. Wnuk-Lipiński writes about the pluralization of the public sphere, which took place with the disappearance of the rigid control the communist system had over public life. In the conditions of a democratic system “articulation of interests and expression of values are not limited by anything, nor the possibility of institutionalization of social forces focused around different interests and differentiated systems of values is limited. These differentiated interests and values that circulate in public sphere can be interpreted to a certain extent as an institutionalized bunch of claims addressed to other members of public life or state institutions.”¹ Pluralization of public sphere is connected with settling such rules of the game in public sphere that, albeit being controlled by the state, are nevertheless established in accordance with democratic procedures. However, as Wnuk-Lipiński writes, “the less democratic a state is, the more narrow is the range of actions permissible in public life and the less is the degree of autonomy of these actions in relations to the state. In cases of a totalitarian state, in public life only such forms of activity are permitted that are initiated by the state and are completely controlled by it.”²

At the same time, many authors who analyze public life and the public sphere in those Western societies often referred to as “old democracies” call attention to the fact that the logic of “a public’s” existence is not always easily combined with the idea of pluralism of its subjects. There has been debate over whether, for example, Habermas’s theory implies a unitary public sphere or multiple publics. Michael Warner in his essay “Publics and Counterpublics” writes that the sense of public as such implies the public as a kind of social totality. “Its most common sense is that of the people in general. It might be the people organized as the nation, the commonwealth, the city, the state, or some other community. It might be very general, as in Christendom or humanity. But in each case the public, as a

1 E. Wnuk-Lipiński, *Socjologia życia publicznego* (Warsaw: Scholar, 2005), 188.

2 Wnuk-Lipiński, *Socjologia życia publicznego*, 211–12.

people, is thought to include everyone within the field in question.”³ Nancy Fraser in her article “Rethinking Public Sphere” analyzes the forms of participation in public life by members of different subgroups, “minorities.” As she observed, when public discourse is understood only as a single, overarching public, members of subgroups have no space to express their needs, objectives, and strategies. Fraser writes that such social subgroups as women, workers, people of color, and gays and lesbians are forced to constitute alternative publics.⁴ These parallel public spheres serve as arenas for members of social subgroups to articulate and manifest their interests and identity. There is a certain paradox in the existence of multiple publics and tendency toward their integration as Craig Calhoun points out. Although “publics” may be multiple in many senses, but “where public discourse addresses, and/or is occasioned by, a state, there is a pressure for reaching integration at the level of that state. It is necessary for plural publics to sustain relations with one another if they are to facilitate democracy within that state by informing its actions.”⁵

The aspiration of the public sphere to an inner integration at the state level inherent in democratic systems, in non-democratic conditions is reduced to a rigid policy of separation and exclusion of those with opposing views. Representation of interests in the public sphere appears subordinate to the logic of confrontation of two disconnected but, in a way, self-sufficient public spheres. One can say that a social subgroup in Belarus is the part of the society that in a radically different way understands its Belarusianness, has different views on the basic contents of the Belarussian national idea. The alternative position refers not only to aspects of individual identification of members of such groups, but also to fundamental issues of life in the state, as well as to understanding of the national essence of this very state. This leads to shaping of two parallel discursive arenas and, in principle, two “public spheres.” Each of them functions based on its own sources of information (state run and non-state run media), its own social organizations (state institutions, educational establishments, on the one hand, and NGOs and different educational centers and institutions, on the other hand), as well as two different cultural spheres.

3 Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 49.

4 Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. C. Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 122–23.

5 Craig Calhoun, “Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 163.

The main problem for non-state media and other public institutions representing alternative ideas of Belarus is the ideological environment in which they exist in Belarus. There is a heavy pressure from the media law, which creates "legal obstacles" in providing people with alternative information, numerous administrative techniques that serve to limit the sphere of influence of the political and cultural opposition.

The Belarusian media law gives the Ministry of Information virtually uncontrolled power over the mass media. Despite the constitutional provisions for freedom of the press, the state has restricted such rights in practice and increasingly asserted control over the press. Restrictions have shut down many independent media outlets, and authorities' warnings have been directed at numerous non-state media outlets. As a result, Belarus became the most repressive country in Europe. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ),⁶ an independent, non-profit organization based in New York City, included Belarus in its list of the "10 most censored countries." These are countries where governments demonstrate zero tolerance for negative coverage, and journalists are not allowed to report the news independently.

In 1998 the Belarusian parliament passed an amendment to the criminal code, which provides for up to five years' imprisonment for insulting the president. The amendment also carries fines and jail sentences for carrying anti-presidential slogans. According to the Press Law, the State Committee on the Press is given authority to suspend publication of a newspaper or periodical for up to three months without a court ruling, and prohibit the use of media to publish "information damaging the honor and dignity of government officials." In short, any criticism of the current situation became punishable. Those who send appeals through the mass media to international organizations or foreign governments, which the authorities believe are "harmful to Belarus's security interests," can be punished. "Discrediting the Republic of Belarus" or "presenting false information about political, social, military, or foreign policy in Belarus" is also punishable.

A series of additional legal measures was introduced by the Belarusian authorities to secure the government's monopoly to publish, report, and comment on official information. The distribution of legal information (for example, laws and government decrees) by non-state media requires a government-issued license from the Ministry of Justice. The conditions for obtaining such a license are extremely onerous.

6 Committee to Protect Journalists, www.cpj.org.

Several years ago, the Glasnost Defence Foundation⁷ discovered the existence of a document, instructing state authorities not to make official documents available or give any information or comment to independent media. The directive primarily hampered the work of regional correspondents, because the regional authorities are particularly assiduous in rigorously fulfilling the order.

This kind of actions means more than just a creation of unequal conditions for the work of state and non-state press. In a post-Soviet society like Belarus, people's ideas about the authorities and the power they exercise are heavily influenced by the mental and psychological legacy of totalitarianism. As Liavon Barshcheuski, director of the Belarusian PEN Center, once noted, Belarusian citizens treat any power as an instrument of pressure and violence over a human being. Therefore, press for them is not so much information about casual happenings in social and political life as a source of "practical" information. The main reason for many people to read newspaper is to forecast (according to the primary source) what they could expect from the authorities and how to avoid a potential danger.⁸ From this perspective, the directive prohibiting state bodies and officials from passing information to independent media makes independent press practically useless. In addition, this law also prohibited state institutions and enterprises from placing advertisements in the non-state press. This is particularly crippling in a country like Belarus where the state controls the majority of large enterprises. Moreover, attracting any foreign financial support for the press is also prohibited by law.

Thus, it is not surprising that in "Enemies of the Press" announcement, which was released by the Committee to Protect Journalists the Belarusian president was named an enemy of the press. In the report of the International Press Institute (IPI) Belarus was named the worst country in Europe for journalists in 2005.⁹

In addition to the restraints reflected in the media law, the Belarusian authorities use various administrative techniques to retain control over broadcast media, printing plants, and newspaper distribution networks using its monopoly to limit public access to information from independent sources. Printing houses, for instance, were ordered not to print private

7 Glasnost Defence Foundation, www.gdf.ru.

8 Liavon Barshcheuski, "The Recurrences of the Past or the Post-Soviet Media-crazy," in *Media in Post-Communist Societies: Objective Information vs. Ideological Bias*, ed. A. Antsipenka (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2003), 118–19.

9 <http://www.freemedia.at>.

newspapers. The postal service was told not to distribute them. The prevailing majority of pro-opposition and independent newspapers were denied services by Belposhta, a national postal service that distributes newspapers by subscription, and Belsaiuzdruk, a state monopoly operating the nation's only chain of newsstands and newspaper kiosks. Tight licensing requirements prevent private periodicals from establishing alternative distribution systems. As a result, in the years 2006–2008 only two non-stateowned weeklies, *Belgazeta* and *Belarusy i Rynok*, were available for purchase at newsstands. The rest were forced underground to look for the alternative ways of distribution. Different practices were explored in order to overcome difficulties created by the authorities: one can buy independent newspapers in certain crowded places in the city from private persons, to get them by mail in envelopes, or, by calling the editorial office and requesting home delivery of the newspaper. All these ways of distribution, though, do enable independent press to survive as an "underground media" phenomenon, but not to influence the general informational landscape in the country. The largest pro-opposition national newspaper in the recent past, *Narodnaia Volia*, is an instructive example of independent newspapers' fate in Belarus. It was printed in the Russian city of Smolensk and has had its print run decreased from 30,000 to 11,000 copies after it was banished from the state distribution system at the end of 2005. Conversely, during the same time period the biggest state-owned newspaper, *Sovetskaia Belorussiia*, saw its daily sales increase to more than 500,000 copies. Government-controlled newspapers enjoy considerable subsidies and financial privileges. In November 2008 the situation changed. After the beginning of the dialogue of the Belarusian authorities with the European Union representatives, the decision was made to allow newspapers *Narodnaia Volia* and *Nasha Niva* again to be distributed through the state retail system. However, this was not an overarching change in the state media policy, but rather an attempt to improve the Belarusian authorities' image in the West.

The Belarusian government does not conceal its desire to establish and keep a monopoly on the information. Moreover, as the head of the state said, while commenting on the government policy in the media field, "The mass media [...] have always been and will remain not only a tool for disseminating the information, but also a powerful means of ideological influence." As a result of the declared instrumentality of media the state press was turned into a supplement to the power and propaganda. The state forces the media not only to articulate ideological messages, but also to "help" promote an official vision of Belarusian life. In some regions, schools

and local governmental institutions are “advised” to subscribe to state-owned periodicals from a list of “acceptable” newspapers and magazines.

At the same time, such repressive policies of the Belarusian regime are not a significant factor for many Belarusians in their relations with the state and its institutions. According to the 2005 opinion poll conducted by the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies the majority of the Belarusian people trust the information provided by the state-run media.

TABLE 8. *Responses to the Question, “Do you trust the media?” (%)*

	Trust	Do not trust	No response
Non-state media	38.5	43.2	18.2
State media	55.3	33.3	11.4

Notes: Opinion poll conducted by the IISEPS sociologists in September 2005; 1,504 were polled.¹⁰

Source: “Doverie SMI,” *Arkhiv analitiki IISEPS*, September 2005, <http://www.iiseps.org/9-05-12.html>.

As the results of the opinion poll show, non-state media are trusted by 38.5 percent, but a higher percentage (43.2 percent) of respondents does not trust them. At the same time, the situation with the state-run media is the reverse—53.3 percent trust them, and their trust index is positive.

The question arises, is such solid and confident position of state media (and the regime’s policy in general) is the result of heavy propaganda put into operation by the media? Or, on the contrary, people choose and trust media because the ideas and values they articulate correspond to their own ideas and values. One can say that for many Belarusians the picture of the world proposed by the official media is close and relevant, just as the picture drawn by the independent media appears to be close and appropriate for others.

State-run press serves to demonstrate and illustrate social stability in the country and to display the undoubted competence of the authorities. Stability is interpreted as an absolute control over all the processes in society. In general Belarus is cheerfully pictured as a peaceful island whose prosperity grows every day. The message that can be roughly decoded on the pages of independent press is the opposite: the authorities are senseless

10 “Doverie SMI,” *Arkhiv analitiki IISEPS*, September 2005, <http://www.iiseps.org/9-05-12.html>.

and untalented, they are not able to handle the economic and social problems, and the only possibility to survive in the country is to join the opposition.

Valiantsin Akudovich, a writer and analyst from the "opposite" camp, believes that both discourses of the state and non-state press serve to create and to explicate "the national myth," the idea of Belarus real and desired.¹¹ The confrontation between them is indeed a fight for Belarusianness, though unequal and unfair. In 2005 the government deprived independent Belarusian press of their status of "being Belarusian." According to a new decree, privately owned Belarusian media are not allowed to use the words "national" or "Belarus" in their names. Among the newspapers forced to change their names and reregister were several popular ones: *Belorusskaia Delovaia Gazeta*, *Belorusskaia Gazeta*, *Belorusskii Ry-nok*, and *Natsionalnaia Ekamicheskaja Gazeta*. The decree does not aim to prevent the dissemination of information independent of the state; its main aim is to symbolically deidentify alternative discourses, represented and articulated by non-state press, from "Belarus."

There appears to be strict division between those who support the Belarusian regime, trust the state controlled media, and find Belarusian authorities' policy appropriate and those who rely on alternative sources of information, reject the Belarusian regime's ideology, and support the opposition. These two segments of society constructed with the help of the media seem to be divided by the "invisible wall." In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* Marshall McLuhan wrote: "For most of our lifetime civil war has been raging in the world of art and entertainment [...] Moving pictures, gramophone records, radio, talking pictures. This is the view of Donald McWhinnie, analyst of the radio medium. Most of this civil war affects us in the depth of our psychic lives, as well, since the war is conducted by forces that are extensions and amplifications of our own being. Indeed, the interplay among media is only another name for this 'civil war' that rages in our society and our psyches alike."¹²

This metaphor of a "civil war" in the media space of an open democratic society reflects the basic idea of informational interrelations within a liberal political and social system. According to the "mass media design" of this system, frequent informational attacks on humanity provide at least

11 Valiantsin Akudovich, "Media as a Myth Factory or the Study of One Aesthetic Defeat," in *Media in Post-Communist Societies*, 110–14.

12 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 48.

potential access to the different streams of information. That makes the whole picture of reality potentially “visible.” To be “visible” means to be “real,” no matter whether it is good or bad, true or false. This opportunity to choose provides people with the next option—to agree or disagree, to accept or reject.

One could say that the real problem lies in the very absence of any such civil war in the Belarusian mass media and Belarusian minds. A large part of the population has generally been cocooned in gentle information about their own lives, as provided by the official media. They have not encountered any other version of the socio-political world or any other versions of their own reality. They cannot hear the voice of the political opposition. Moreover, those inhabiting the space on the other side of the “wall” are also limited by their own political convictions and their own stream of information. As a matter of principle, no one is interested in processes going on in the “opposing camp.”

The prevalent intention of the non-state mass media is to present an alternative interpretation of news or facts previously portrayed by the state media. Consequently, the structure of the Belarusian media based on the logic of strong binary opposition actually prevents people from gaining access to the full picture of social and political reality. There is no way to create a full picture of the Belarusian reality from inside the Belarusian informational space.

Though ideological work on both sides of the information wall is extremely intensified, political and information efforts lead to the wall being strengthened, make it higher and more solid. The arguments used by both sides only take into consideration the people on their side of the wall. They are aimed at and capable of convincing people who have already agreed with and accepted them. The Belarusian society resembles two movie theaters divided by a wall, where two different movies about their life are being projected onto either side of the wall. What’s more, each projection is self-sufficient and complete enough to provide a full picture of the world. The other side of the wall can also be seen from one’s own side of the screen, without having to be interested in the real existence of those people, or their opinions, desires, and problems (even if some of them live next door).

The “wall” is not only a metaphor for the description of the division in Belarusian society. It becomes the hidden factor effecting some essential deformations of public space. New information technology like the Internet usually serves to widen the public’s horizons and make the borders between different public spheres more transparent. In the case of Belarus,

however, it in fact results in an opposite effect; that is, a deepening of the rift between the two strata of society, one of which uses the Internet, while the other watches Belarusian TV. (According to various sources, the number of Internet users in Belarus is around 30–50 percent of the population, and 60–70 percent of them live in Minsk.)¹³

The parallel existence of alternative public sphere in Belarus is not a political problem in itself. The need of alternative discursive arenas exists also in places where the general principles of the political system are quite democratic and liberal. The real problem is the total polarization of the public sphere in the Belarusian society, which was inherited from the Soviet empire. As M. Zhabankou writes, there is no competitive media environment, in which "informational myths" compete on equal conditions for consumer's attention, like the one in post-industrial mosaic society. The main feature of the Belarusian media landscape is the strong ideological opposition—"the fight for commanding heights." "This is a big game, with no one willing to accept 'a consolatory prize.' This is the game of survival, and the victory means the end to the competitor. Such media landscape is [...] a landscape of extreme conflict. The opposed to each other ideologically biased media [...] pursue similar objectives: shaping the attitudes and managing the sentiment. In a certain sense, these are the players for the same league, yet from different clubs."¹⁴

The situation in the media space reflects the state of the public sphere in Belarusian society. It shows the informational background, against which one can see the struggle between the official and the oppositional discourses. The media provide citizens with the flows of current information and news, as well as their evaluation of it which, on the level of everyday life, set certain guidelines in relation to what is going on in the country. In this manner, they establish certain reference points needed for the perception of the general picture of the world with a definite embedded version of the national Belarusian idea.

13 According to Internet World Stats (www.internetworldstats.com) project there were 5 477 500 internet users in Belarus in 2007, which is about 56% of the whole population. Belarusian research group "MASMI BY" (<http://masmi.by/>) provided the data according to which 33% of respondents in Belarus use internet. These data are close to the numbers mentioned in the annual "Report on human development" published by the United Nations Organization in 2006.

14 Maksim Zhabankou, "The War of Mythologies: the Propagandist Vocabulary of Belarusian Mass Media," in *Media in post-Communist Societies: Objective Information vs. Ideological bias*, ed. A. Antsipenka (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2003), 135–136.

Belarusian History: The Alternative and Official Historical Narrations

In an 1882 lecture titled “What Is a Nation” Ernest Renan said: “Forgetting history, or even getting history wrong, is an essential factor in the formation of a nation.” This popular phrase communicates the fundamental truths about history: its significance for a nation (“Nations without a past are contradictions in terms,” writes Eric Hobsbawm)¹ and its instrumental character.

Both of these aspects have become conventional wisdom for students of nationalism. Modernists emphasize that history and culture are essential parts of the fabric of popular visions through which the elite must forge their strategies. As Hobsbawm writes, “Historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market.”² From the ethnocultural perspective too, what gives a nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritage and “the ways in which a popular living past had been [...] rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsia.”³ The only, although extremely meaningful, difference between the two approaches mentioned above is in treating tradition as “invented” in modernist view, and as “rediscovered and reinterpreted” in ethnoculturalist one. The development of Belarusian historiography between 1990–2008 and the process of shaping of Belarusian tradition show how difficult it can be to determine the boundary between an “invention” and a “reinterpretation” of the tradition.

As a result of several political transformations that have taken place in Belarus after the collapse of the ideological machinery of the Soviet state, there have appeared two parallel schools of Belarusian history. To one of them belong works of historians written from the standpoint of state ideology. Their narrative supports truths and values of the official concept of Belarusianness. To the other belong works of the authors who represent an

1 Eric Hobsbawm, “Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today,” in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. G. Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 255.

2 Hobsbawm, “Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today,” 255.

3 Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 9.

alternative view of Belarus's history and who provide the historical argumentation for the alternative Belarusianness. To this school we can add earlier studies that were forbidden in the Soviet time, because they contradicted Soviet interpretation of Belarusian history.

One of the most important distinctions between these two concepts of Belarusian history is in the sphere of geopolitics. These two histories assess the landmarks of Belarusian past in different ways with relation to Eastern or Western influences present in Belarusian lands. The official historical school describes the activity of the Russian power on Belarusian lands as positively affecting the development of the Belarusian people; Orthodoxy is declared here "a Belarusian religion." Affiliation to state unions or federations outside Russia (the Grand Duchy of Lithuania [GDL] and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) is considered by them as having a negative impact on Belarusian people and their lands.

On the contrary, the alternative history emphasizes positive meaning of the periods that are bound with the GDL and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The GDL is depicted as "our country," the Uniate Church as the Belarusian religion. Accordingly, the conquest of Belarusian lands by the Russian empire is depicted as an occupation, and the reintroduction of Orthodoxy on Belarusian lands is considered forcible.

In order to compare how the same developments in the past are employed to form different versions of the Belarusian tradition, several examples of interpretations of the most significant topics and events of the Belarusian past in the official and alternative history are described below. They include the epoch of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth formation, the impact of the Russian empire, and the formation of the *Belaruskaja Narodnaia Respublika* (BNR, Belarusian People's Republic). General "histories of Belarus" intended for broad readership and textbooks for higher learning institutions were used as a source. The study is focused not so much on detailed descriptions of the past by historians as on those fragments of their works where they make generalizations and conclusions, offering a generalized view of Belarusian history. It is precisely these conclusions that reflect a certain evaluation of the Belarusian past events and set up values for Belarusian national idea.

The definition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Belarusians' role in its emergence and development, as well as the significance of this experience for the Belarusian people, relations within the state and interrelations with the neighbors—all of these topics are subject to contradictory interpretations by the two schools of Belarusian history. As far as acknowledging the significant role played by the GDL in the history of

Belarusians, opinions of both the official and the alternative historians more or less converge. However, the two significantly differ concerning the degree of the GDL's supposed "Belarusianness."

Timothy Snyder writes in his comparative study of nationalism that current Belarusian nationalism's failure to address the historical legacy of GDL has become one of the major reasons for Belarusian national failure: "Modern Lithuanian and Polish nationalists have shown us that national ideologies have succeeded insofar as they transformed the Grand Duchy legacies. [...] Modern Belarusian nationalism, if it arrives, will probably involve a mythical notion of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This old idea will have to be reconstructed to account for the Orthodox religion and Soviet historical memory of the majority of Belarusian population."⁴

This reproach is hardly justified, as the alternative Belarusianness is built entirely on references to that legacy. The alternative historiography emphasizes the dominance of Belarusianness in that period and the epoch of the GDL is considered the Golden Age of Belarusian history.

In *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918* (Ten Centuries of Belarusian History), Arlou and Saganovich call the GDL "our state," and present its tradition as part of the historical tradition of Belarus's statehood. The rise of the GDL is seen as a result of mutual movement of several peoples. "Unification of weak separate lands into one strong state was in the interest of both the Baltic population and the East European one, as from the East they were attacked by Tatar-Mongolians, and from the West German knights were beginning their pressure. There had been a long tradition of close ties between Lithuanians and Krivichi. That is why the creation of a united state occurred naturally and without much ado."⁵ Mindauh⁶ had built a state that from the outset was not just Lithuanian, but Lithuano-Belarusian. He was well aware that he could not count on Lithuanians only in his state-building because the Lithuanian tribe was not large enough, and had no cultural might. It was important to attract the Polatsk citizenry to the task of state-building as they were the only source of armed forces and an organizational and cultural tradition required by the new state. It should be stressed that the Polatsk Principality certainly supported the new state with its customs, management, and culture.⁷

4 Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations, Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, 280, 284.

5 Uladzimir Arlou and Genadz Saganovich, *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918* (Vilnius: Nasha Buduchynia, 1999), 48.

6 The first Grand Duke of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

7 Usievalad Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi* (Minsk: Belarus', 1991), 73.

Mikola Ermalovich devoted his work *Pa sliadakh adnago mifa* (Tracing one Myth) to the task of “the estimation” of the degree of “Belarusian-ness” of the GDL. From his research he draws the conclusion that “the creation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was first of all the result of economic, political and ethno-cultural convergence and unification of Belarusian lands,”⁸ that is why “this historical process was in the interest of Belarusian feudal lords, [a fact which] characterizes this state as a primarily Belarusian one.”⁹ Ihnatouski emphasizes that the relations within the Duchy were peaceful and harmonic, which does not conform to the concept of the GDL widely spread in the Soviet time—that Belarusian lands had been conquered by Lithuanians. He writes that “the Lithuanian and Belarusian state was built by way of agreement rather than by way of pressure and war.”¹⁰

In all these narratives one can discern the idea of the GDL as largely Belarusian state, as a political unit where the Belarusian culture and language were the basis of the state. Some enthusiastic researchers go even further when they call the GDL a purely Belarusian state. Mikola Ermalovich’s book published in 2007 is titled *Belarускаia dziazrhava Vialikaie Kniastva Litouskaie* (The Belarusian State, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania). Viktor Veras, the author of an unpublished manuscript *U istokov istaricheskoi pravdy* (At the Origins of the Historical Truth) writes: “The ethnos that emerged in the middle of the eleventh century is called Belarusian now and the state by this ethnos could not have been Belaruso-Lithuanian, as Belarusian researchers put it; or Lithuano-Belarusian, according to the Lithuanian researchers; or a Lithuano-Russian, as Russian scientists say, because contemporary Belarusians and Litvins of the GDL are the same ethnos.”¹¹

The official histories categorically disagree with such interpretations. Thus, the textbook on Belarusian history published in 2005 is very reserved in its estimation of Belarusians’ presence in the GDL: “the GDL was initially formed as a Lithuanian state and later transformed into a polyethnic Lithuanian–Belarusian–Ukrainian–Russian state.”¹² At the same time, the authors admit the political significance of this state for the development of

8 Mikola Ermalovich, *Pa sliadakh adnago mifa* (Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika, 1991), <http://asveta.belinter.net/histermalovich.html>.

9 Ermalovich, *Pa sliadakh adnago mifa*.

10 Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi*, 81.

11 Viktor Veras, *U istokov istaricheskoi pravdy*, <http://veras.litvin.org/>

12 I. I. Kovkel and E. S. Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni* (Minsk: Aversez, 2005), 22.

the Belarusian people: "The main role in the formation of the Belarusian ethnos and the emergence of Belarus was played by the political unification of Belarusian lands within the single state, the GDL."¹³ They also admit the role of the GDL in the formation of the Belarusian language which, according to them, "was transformed out of the common Slavonic Old-Russian language. What promoted its rapid dissemination and consolidation on the whole ethnic territory of Belarus was the fact that it was the official state language of the GDL, which incorporated the Belarusian lands."¹⁴

The authors of another official textbook *Gistoria Belarusi* (History of Belarus) disagree with the researchers who call the GDL a Belaruso-Lithuanian or Lithuano-Belarusian state. They insist on the established version of the Soviet historiography: "The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was not created by just forebears of contemporary Belarusians and Lithuanians, that is why it is neither Belaruso-Lithuanian, nor Lithuano-Belarusian state, as it is stated in some modern publications. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania is a political state of four basic peoples—Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian and Lithuanian, where Slavs occupied about 11/12 of the territory and comprised about 80 percent of the country's population. That is why, in our opinion, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania can be called a Lithuano-Russian or Russo-Lithuanian state, as it had been stated in the pre-revolutionary Russian and Soviet historiography."¹⁵

Remarkably, in the 1940s–50s the GDL was typically depicted in Soviet history textbooks as a result of Lithuanian aggression on Belarusian (East European) lands. In the 1970s this concept was replaced by a picture of a more neutral unification, although publications on the GDL history as a Lithuano-Belarusian or Belaruso-Lithuanian state remained banned until perestroika.¹⁶ Among these banned publications were Ihnatouski's 1920s works and Mikola Ermalovich's alternative history of Belarus written in the 1960s (although both were only published in the 1990s). Soviet historiography actively supported the idea that Belarusians obtained their first national state in the form of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic

13 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 36.

14 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 37.

15 Ya. Martsul, Ya. Novik, *Gistoria Belarusi u dzviukh chastkah, Chastka 1* (Minsk: Vysheishaia shkola, 2003), 163.

16 Valiantsin Hrytskevich in his book *Gistoria i mify* describes the fight with the ideas of alternative ethnogenesis of Belarusians during Soviet time. He mentions for example, that the Symposium on the Belarusian ethnogenesis was banned by Soviet authorities V. Hrytskevich, *Gistoria i mify* (Minsk: Belfrans, 1998), 19–20.

(BSSR) as a result of the October revolution. The idea of the GDL as a Belaruso-Lithuanian or Lithuano-Belarusian state could have been a negation of the exclusive “gift” of national statehood to Belarusians granted by Bolsheviks. It is instructive to observe the transformation of the official Belarussian history after the attainment of independence. On the one hand, in the official history after 1991 there was a shift toward recognition of the historical “separateness” of Belarusians. As compared with the Soviet historiography, new post-Soviet histories acknowledge a more independent status of Belarusians in history, and the Belarussian own tradition of statehood is not negated. On the other hand, the official “Russo-Belarussian brotherhood” remains to be actively cultivated by means of the relevant interpretations of history; hence, one can easily notice predominantly Russia-oriented evaluations of events.

Authors of the alternative Belarussian history stress the difference between the political systems of the GDL and the Moscow state. From this one can discern the idea that there is a Belarussian political tradition, which largely differs from that of Russia. The autocratic totalitarianism of Moscow Principality is opposed by autonomy and self-governance observed within the GDL. In this tradition, one can clearly see the historical proximity of Belarusians to the Western civilization and visible distance from the Eastern neighbor—Moscow Principality.

Arlou and Saganovich write:

The obvious disproportion of the military potentials of the Moscow state and the Great Duchy of Lithuania was to a great extent stipulated by the difference of their internal systems. *Our state* was developing in the direction of strengthening constitutionalism and autonomy. Since the sixteenth century, the ruler [the Great Prince—] dispensed different privileges, granted personal and proprietary liberties to senior gentry, thus making himself dependent on them. By the end of the fifteenth century, the monarch’s power in the GDL was officially restricted by the Veche [council], and in the sixteenth century, by the gentry’s Soim [parliament]. During coronation the monarch had to take an oath to his subjects that he would not breach their rights and liberties. His decrees could be legitimized only after their adoption by the entire Soim. For centuries, old principalities, lands, and liberties, that preserved certain autonomy and a degree of separation, existed within the GDL.

The Moscow state developed in a different direction. In the fifteenth century it had a distinctly despotic character. The tsar’s power here

was in no way restricted. When incorporating new lands, Moscow deprived them of all rights, leveled off local peculiarities, and submitted them to central administration.”¹⁷

Ihnatouski, too, wrote about the difference between political structures of the two states: “While in the Moscow state there developed a despotism never met before in the Russian lands, the Lithuano-Belarusian state further developed the political tradition of the Polatsk Principality, on whose basis the prince’s power was restricted by the Veche.”¹⁸ Padokshin develops this idea and writes about differences in Belarusian and Russian mentality: “the basis of the political mentality of the GDL as well as the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was constitutional monarchy restricted by law and representative institutions, while the basis of the Russian political system was the idea of unlimited autocratic power.”¹⁹ The GDL, which he calls an integrated Belaruso-Ukraino-Lithuanian state, “was created mainly by means of agreements, consensus, on the one hand, between ethnic groups and confessions, and, on the other hand, between the Great Prince’s and, later, the King’s power and those of feudal citizenry.”²⁰

In these descriptions one can see not just different historical paths of Belarus and Russia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The tradition of Russian statehood, the specific “Russian way,” and complicated relations with Western values in the contemporary political perspective, unconditionally involve in its orbit the Belarusian people as an eternal “junior brother” of the great Russian people. Acceptance of the GDL as a Belaruso-Lithuanian state and its distinction from the Moscow state makes it possible to “build” Belarusians into a different political tradition.

In the alternative Belarusian history the behavior of the Eastern neighbor, Russia—from the time of Moscow Principality to later Czarist Russia—is depicted as aggressive and interventionist. The official Belarusian history prefers to avoid such negative description in relation to brotherly Russia. As a result, the same events are presented differently in the two histories. Arlou and Saganovich write about the war between the GDL and Moscow Principality: “At the end of 1512 Moscow started a new war for the ‘primordial Russian lands’—Belarus and Ukraine, which had never been

17 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 52–53.

18 Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi*, 107.

19 Siamion Padokshin, “Kashtounasti i idealy belaruskaga adradzhennia,” *Belarusika Alba-ruthenica* 13 (2000): 39.

20 Siamion Padokshin, “Belarus’: fragmenty gistoryi svabody,” *Fragmenty*, nos. 1–2 (2000): 284.

under Moscow governance.”²¹ Conversely, Kovkel and Iarmusik picture the beginning of the war in an entirely neutral way, as a bilateral mutual process: “In the early sixteenth century the GDL and the Moscow state opened military actions against each other.”²²

Accordingly, there are different interpretations of the union of the GDL with the Polish Crown and the creation of the Commonwealth. For alternative historians, the union of the GDL and Poland was forced by the threat from the Moscow state. The official history is inclined to depict this event as a consequence of “the Polish expansion,” never mentioning the Moscow threat. Arlou and Saganovich write: “If the entire sixteenth century the GDL had to take care of defense, the neighboring Moscow state focused its efforts in the military direction, and first of all against its western neighbor [...] The military and economic potential of Moscow already greatly exceeded the mobilization possibilities of Vilnius. Our state lacked strength to defend itself against the invasion. Again there emerged the old issue of the union with Poland.”²³

The authors of the *Gistoria Belarusi* (History of Belarus) describe the Commonwealth creation in an emphatically sad manner: “1569 opened a new, tragic page in Belarusian history. At that time on the political map of Europe an independent and powerful medieval state, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, had disappeared, and a new one, the Commonwealth, that is, republic, emerged. This historical act took place as a result of Lublin Union, which proclaimed the incorporation of the Duchy into Poland and the creation of the Commonwealth.”²⁴ The impression is made that the GDL was deceptively seized by the Polish kingdom: “How did it happen that without a single shot, without struggle a whole state had disappeared, having turned into a Polish province of its own free will?”²⁵ ask the authors with pathos. However, they do not mention the fact that this step had been taken in order to be saved from Moscow’s aggression. Alternative history provides the answer: “Unification with the Crown made it possible to liberate Polatsk, to drive the occupational Moscow troops out of Belarus, to improve the economy.”²⁶

Moscow’s aggressive behavior and the loss of Belarusian lands during the wars with the Lithuano-Belarusian state are also depicted by Ihnatous-

21 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 86.

22 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 24.

23 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 108.

24 Martsul and Novik, *Gistoria Belarusi u dzviukh chastkah*, *Chastka 1*, 170.

25 Martsul and Novik, *Gistoria Belarusi u dzviukh chastkah*, *Chastka 1*, 170.

26 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 108.

ki. "Such towns as Polatsk, Mstislau, Mahileu, Vorsha, Rohachou, Gomel, Vitebsk, Smalensk, and others had been ruined several times. We even do not take into account the enormous number of villages, small settlements that had been ruined during that struggle. Everything built by the efforts of popular masses for centuries was ruined at the times of imperialist struggle."²⁷ Ihnatouski concludes with sad irony: "The imperialist idea of Moscow lords that Belarus was their 'patrimony' cost Belarusian people dearly."²⁸ In Ihnatouski's opinion, the Commonwealth was, albeit forced by external circumstances, a voluntary union of the GDL with Poland. "In search of escape from Moscow's pressure, Litva and Belarus had to rely on Poland's support."²⁹

The official history describing the same events emphasizes that the GDL was subordinated to Poland and influenced by it, which is why this period of development of the Belarusian people is viewed in a negative light. The union with Poland signified an alienation of Belarusianness. "On the basis of the Lublin Union, the GDL and Poland began their common political life. Since that time the independent diplomatic and military history of the Great Duchy of Lithuania no longer existed. As a part of the unified Commonwealth it had to defend alien interests. In particular, conflicts and wars with Russia were conducted mainly on the basis of Polish interests."³⁰

At the same time, for the official history "the Russian origin" of Belarusians is one of the fundamental premises of Belarusianness, and from this standpoint the epoch of the Commonwealth is when "Russianness" of Belarusians was under the threat of oblivion. Some sources present "Russianness" actually as the major feature of Belarusians. "The government of the Commonwealth as a state was least of all concerned with the development of Belarusians as a self-contained people that had to maintain the knowledge of its common Russian origin [...] With every decade of their existence within the Commonwealth, the majority of Belarusians grew more and more aware that for their further historical development they had to return to the true source of their statehood, to their East Slavonic roots [...] to the common Russian political and state values."³¹

The same predetermination is seen in the description of the confessional situation in the Commonwealth. The official history unconditionally ascribed Belarusians to Orthodoxy. The agreement on the creation of the

27 Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi*, 96.

28 Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi*, 96.

29 Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi*, 112.

30 P. G. Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi* (Minsk: Vysheishaia shkola, 2004), 137.

31 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 190.

Church Union signed in Brest in 1596 and the establishment of the Greek Catholic Church, let alone Catholicism, are viewed as negative phenomena in Belarus's development. "A real misfortune for the Belarusian people was the gradual penetration into their midst of Catholicism and the formation of biconfessionalism."³² In reality the negativism of Catholicism and the Church Union consisted in the fact that they were conducive to an estrangement of Belarusians from Moscow state. "The Orthodox faith brought together Belarus and its strong Eastern neighbor in the cultural and spiritual aspects. Moreover, Belarus was subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate in church hierarchy, which caused natural disapproval in Poland."³³ According to Ihnatouski, this caused disapproval in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania itself. He writes about attempts to remove the Orthodox Church of the Grand Duchy from the power of the Moscow metropolitan see and to elect metropolitan of Lithuania and Belarus in the early fifteenth century. "An independent political state demanded also independence in church relations."³⁴ Only by the end of the sixteenth century, together with the establishment of the Moscow patriarchate, "the Orthodox Church of Lithuania and Belarus was put into hierarchic subordination to Moscow. As a counterbalance, in 1596 in the Lithuano-Belarusian state there emerged and shaped Church Union with papacy."³⁵

Overall, historians who maintain the official stance consider the creation of the Uniate Church to be an instrument of further Polonization of Belarusians in the Commonwealth, which in their view had an "obvious" negative impact. "The adoption of the Church Union had complicated the social and political situation in Belarus. It facilitated a more active penetration of the Polish religious and cultural influence, which eventually led to a decline of the Belarusian language culture and, consequently, of the national development."³⁶ Chigrinov acknowledges the peaceful character of the process of the Uniate Church setup. The establishment of the Uniate Church "proved to be a unique religious and cultural-national event in Belarusian history. The introduction of the Uniate Church did not cause a radical break of the religious people's traditions and customs that could have been sensitive to the religious state of the believers."³⁷ Other authors draw a picture of active resistance: "The Union caused disappointment and

32 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 175.

33 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 175.

34 Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi*, 109–10.

35 Ihnatouski, *Karotki narys gistoryi Belarusi*, 110.

36 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 181.

37 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 180.

protest among the majority of the Orthodox Eastern European, manifested in anti-catholic and Polish movements.”³⁸ They emphasize the violent character of the Uniate Church introduction and its “Polish tint.” “With the adoption of the Union, Orthodox Churches became forcibly turned into Uniate ones. [...] Together with the Catholic Church, the Uniate one had also become a major landowner and exploiter of the working masses. The people understood the true purposes of the Union and rose to fight it. Due to the resistance, the implementation of the Union lingered on for decades.”³⁹

The Uniate Church had positive influences as well, for instance, in the development of the Belarusian language, which cannot be refuted even by supporters of the official paradigm. Chigrinov notes, “the creation of the Uniate Greek Catholic Church allowed to maintain the Orthodox rites that were an indivisible part of the Belarusians’ cultural life and, which is especially important, to develop the native language, as the liturgy was conducted not only in the Church Slavonic language, but also in Belarusian.”⁴⁰ However, the official attitude toward the Church Union remains negative: “This Church was a means of Catholicization of the population on the national basis, and not a national church as a symbol of the state’s sovereignty.”⁴¹

This negative evaluation of the Church Union is contradicted by a different interpretation of the same period in the alternative history. Arlou and Saganovich write about the Uniate Church as a lost possibility of the national religion of Belarusians. The reversion of Belarusians to the bosom of the Orthodox Church, which began after the Commonwealth division and the establishment of the Russian rule on Belarusian lands, was a forcible act aimed to erase Belarusian original nature. “The Russian autocracy did not recognize Belarusians as a separate people while the Uniate Church with its vernacular language used in education and sermons insisted on the opposite ideas. Meanwhile in Belarus in the late eighteenth century every three out of four residents were Uniates, while the share of the Orthodox believers was just 6.5 percent. Under Catherine II, 1.5 million of our ancestors had been converted from the dangerous Uniate Church into the safe Russian Orthodoxy.”⁴² The violent elimination of the Uniate religion had

38 V. K. Bandarchyk et al., *Etnagrafia Belarussau* (Minsk: Navuka i Tekhnika, 1985), 101.

39 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 50.

40 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 189.

41 Martsul and Novik, *Gistoria Belarusi u dzviukh chastkah, Chastka 1*, 258.

42 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 186.

long-term implications for Belarusians: “Colonizers had deprived Belarus of the religion that can be rightfully considered a popular national one (this is how it was called by Kastus Kalinowski, Maksim Bagdanovich and a number of other activists of the national revival), they consolidated the division of Belarusians into Catholic and Orthodox believers. This is one of the main reasons for the weak national unification of Belarusians, which caused us so much trouble in the ensuing century.”⁴³ Indeed, the Uniate Church, according to Arlou and Saganovich, had become a “holder” of the Belarusian cultural values and focused the spirit of the national cultural development. “Together with the violent conversion of our forefathers into the ‘true’ faith, a great stratum of Belarusian culture was being eliminated—czarist helpmates in church attire were burning Uniate sculptures, sawing Greek Catholic crucifixes, throwing icons out of churches. Many books were set on fire, and not only religious literature, Orthodox fanatics burned all olden Belarusian publications.”⁴⁴ These authors believe that the elimination of the Uniate Church was actually aimed at a complete Russification of Belarusians. At the same time, the authors of the official concept of the Belarusian past claim rights to the opposite, that “the Union abolition was objectively conducive to consolidation of the Belarusian ethnos.”⁴⁵

The evaluation of the Belarusians’ development in the Commonwealth epoch is also varied. Arlou and Saganovich write that “this period was exceptionally favorable for the economic development of the country. Initially, it was displayed in the rapid growth of new towns and settlements (on the territory of contemporary Belarus they amounted to 48 prior to the sixteenth century, while by the mid-seventeenth century the number was 462), emerging of new artisan trades and shops, and expanding markets. The given period was probably the time of the highest economic development of medieval Belarus.”⁴⁶

The official history describes the Commonwealth period in terms of sublimed Belarusians’ commitment to Russia. Within the new state relations with the western neighbors—Poles—threatened Belarusians, while their salvation was in the East. “The attempts of Polish feudal lords to break the Russo-Belarusian economic and cultural ties failed. The attraction of the Belarusian people toward Russia, on the contrary, was strengthening.”⁴⁷ Hence the general conclusion concerning this period of Belarusian history:

43 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 186.

44 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 187.

45 Bandarchyk, Chakvin et al., 147.

46 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 109.

47 Kovkel and Yarmisik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 63.

“The Lublin Union had a negative impact for Belarusians not only in the political aspect, but also in the cultural one.”⁴⁸

The Commonwealth division and the annexation of Belarusian lands by the Russian empire cause differences in the official and the alternative histories. Different descriptions are given of the political setup of the state, including the level of its economic development and its influence on Belarusian territories. Arlou and Saganovich write: “For all its problems, on the eve of its peril the Commonwealth was a noblemen’s republic, where capitalism had been rapidly developing. Meanwhile in Russia absolute feudal monarchy had reached its top power with its medieval laws, or, to be more exact, lawlessness.”⁴⁹

On the contrary, for the official history Russia was a more progressive state: “The reunification with Russia urged a rapid process of capitalist development in Belarus, included it in the all-Russian market [...] all the economic reforms conducted by the Russian authorities in western regions had a more profound socioeconomic significance: they were aimed at raising their economic development to the all-Russian level.”⁵⁰ What for Arlou and Saganovich is a positive aspect of the Commonwealth—lack of absolute authoritarian power, in the official textbook is treated as one of the reasons for its ruin. Some conclusions concerning the political system of the Commonwealth in the textbook on Belarusian history include ideologically transparent commentary by the authors on the debates about the Belarusian political present. “The over 200-year-old history of the Commonwealth is an instructive lesson for the progeny: unrestricted democracy together with the elected monarchy is the worst form of state management, which usually leads to a split of the ruling class into political factions, brings about such immoral phenomena as bribery, corruption, loss of responsibility for the destiny of Motherland, egotism, and individualism. Another danger for the state is a division of the society along ethnical and ideological lines, which leads to civil wars. The above-mentioned features weaken the state from the inside and make it an easy prey to its neighbors.”⁵¹

In fact different interpretations of Belarus’s history serve purposeful orientation of the Belarusian political tradition—to the East or to the West. Accordingly, the alternative history portraying Belarus as part of Europe depicts its forced occupation and decline of Belarusian lands under the

48 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 189.

49 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 160.

50 Martsul and Novik, *Gistoria Belarusi u dzviukh chastkah*, *Chastka 1*, 303.

51 Martsul and Novik, *Gistoria Belarusi u dzviukh chastkah*, *Chastka 1*, 261.

authority of the Russian crown. The official history views this epoch and the changes it had brought about in the positive light.

Arlou and Saganovich write: "In 1793 [...] (Russia, Austria and Prussia) carried out the division, distributing among themselves the remains of the Commonwealth and eliminating it as a state. At the same time the Grand Duchy of Lithuania ceased to exist, too. The whole territory of Belarus became a part of the Russian empire. Thus started a new epoch of Belarusian history—one hundred and twenty years of a stateless people's existence in a foreign totalitarian state."⁵² The accentuation is clear—a foreign state had annexed and subordinated Belarus. The consequences of the aggressive activities of the Russian empire are also described by Arlou and Saganovich in terms of a destructive occupation of Belarusian lands.

According to Akinchyts, the process of Belarus's deidentification with its past began from the moment of the Belarusian lands annexation by the Russian empire. "The national apathy that had embraced our society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resulted in its loss of the name and, simultaneously, of its history. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the inhabitants of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania acquired the name of Belarusians, while the name 'Litva' began to be used for the Baltic country Zhamoyt. The ensuing confusion still prevents Belarusians to answer the question 'Who are we?' and find their place in history."⁵³ Against this background, the estimations of the Belarusian annexation by official historians look overly optimistic. They proceed from the premise that "the joining of Belarus to Russia on the whole had progressive significance. There began a rapid development of the economy and culture, while religious and national oppression was reduced. It was facilitated by the czarist government's policy aimed at the consolidation of its influence on the acquired lands."⁵⁴

Because the official historians profess a Marxist approach to history, they divide the country into that of the oppressing and the oppressed classes. From this standpoint, "the situation of the ruling classes on Belarusian territories after they were annexed by Russia did not actually change. The ruling classes maintained their rights and privileges completely. Just the anarchy of the gentry and the self-will of magnates was liquidated."⁵⁵ They, however, note positive changes in the economic development: "When in December 1773 the Senate abolished the custom duties on the export of agricultural production and timber to Russia and abroad, it helped to revive

52 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 111.

53 Akinchyts, *Zalaty vek Belarusi*, <http://knihi.com/bel/zalaty.html>

54 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 81.

55 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 80.

agriculture, to improve its marketability, to better develop industry and trade.”⁵⁶ Official historians also report about a new wave of cultural development of Belarusians. “The successful development of economy and political changes were conducive to the cultural revival. The number of schools, libraries increased, the local population displayed a greater interest for Russian culture, science, the social and political life of the country.”⁵⁷

Kovkel and Iarmusik provide a list of achievements in this respect. “A scientific study of Belarus was begun. In February 1773, the Russian Academy of Sciences took a decision to send two expeditions to the eastern region of Belarus [...] The expeditions collected a large mass of materials on the natural conditions of Belarus, its mineral resources, historical monuments, the life and customs of the population. Since the late 1770s a general land surveying was carried out in Belarus, during which an extensive material had been collected on the statistics and economy of Belarus. Many materials had been published.”⁵⁸

Chigrinov is also convinced in the positive effect of the Russian possession of Belarusian lands. “In the spiritual and cultural sphere one of the basic problems for the Orthodox Belarusian population was being solved, which was related to the purposeful, active, sometimes forced dissemination of Catholicism and Polonization. These phenomena came to an end [with the Russian takeover]. Historically, the joining of Belarus to Russia at the end of the nineteenth century was a progressive phenomenon, which prevented the threat of denationalization of the Belarusian people.”⁵⁹ Another official textbook, *Gistoria Belarusi*, claims that “the incorporation of Belarus into the Russian empire was conducive to consolidation of the Belarusian people, to their increased self-awareness as a special ethnic community.”⁶⁰

It is noteworthy that the “threat of denationalization” is mentioned in both the official and the alternative histories. However, in the two cases different denationalizations are described. The official history speaks about the threat of denationalization on the part of Poland, which is opposed by the threat of Russification and denationalization on the part of Russia in the alternative history. Arlou and Saganovich write: “Orthodoxy was assigned the main role in Russification and denationalization of Belarusians. In 1840 (when the relevant czarist decree banned the use of the name ‘Belarus’ in official papers) there appeared prohibition to preach in Bela-

56 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 80.

57 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 80.

58 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 81.

59 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 191.

60 Martsul and Novik, *Gistoria Belarusi u dzviukh chastkah*, *Chastka 1*, 303.

rusian in the Church liturgy.”⁶¹ Chigrinov, on the contrary, states that the Russian authorities were the first to name Belarus “Belarus:” “In 1772 Byelorussian general-governorship was set up, with the center in Mogilev, at first, and later in Vitebsk. Actually, it was the first state administrative formation whose title was identical to its basic ethnos.”⁶² Without doubting this nominative gift of the Russian authorities to Belarusians, one nevertheless has to take into account the fact reported by Arlou and Saganovich: in 1840 the Russian authorities decreed a ban on the official use of the name Belarus and renamed these lands into a northwestern province of the Russian empire. And Belarusians were now officially referred to as western Russians. This action was accompanied by the deprivation of Belarusian towns of Magdeburg law and closing of the Vilnius University (1832).

Another subject of opposite interpretations is the setup of the Belarusian People’s Republic. Soviet historiography, as a rule, does not mention the event. It was not until the early 1990s, in post-Soviet Belarus, that a reference appeared to the BPR as the first independent Belarusian state. Today the fact of the BPR’s existence is not ignored and the majority of official textbooks on Belarusian history contain references to the BPR.

Kovkel and Iarmusik state that the BPR was “declared as a free and independent state” by the Rada of the BPR. However, the dominant meaning of this event for authors is the fact that it “denoted a breakup of all connections with Soviet Russia.”⁶³ They carry on: “Members of the Rada understood what the declaration of independence of Belarus meant, how strong were the ties between the Belarusian and the Russian peoples. Nevertheless they took the step.”⁶⁴ The authors explain the reasoning behind it in a peculiar manner: “Actually members of the BPR Rada tried to tear Belarus away from revolutionary Russia, to show Germany their readiness to make ‘a union state’ with it in order to ban Soviet power under any conditions.”⁶⁵ Such an interpretation leads to the peculiar idea that all political forces of Belarus aspired to cooperate with Germany and to overthrow the Soviet power instead of creating an independent Belarusian state. Official historians stress the fact that the BPR remained unrecognized and it had been formed on the territory occupied by Germans. Hence the conclusion: “the BPR was not a state in the proper sense.”⁶⁶ The first “real” state unit of Belarusians was the BSSR.

61 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats’ viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 187.

62 Chigrinov, *Ocherki istorii Belarusi*, 192.

63 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 326.

64 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 326.

65 Kovkel and Iarmusik, *Istoria Belarusi s drevneishikh vremion do nashego vremeni*, 327.

66 Martsul and Novik, *Gistorya Belarusi u dzviukh chastkah*, *Chastka 2*, 60.

The alternative history sees the BPR's declaration in a different light. It sees it as the first whole Belarusian state, created in a difficult historical period. Arlou and Saganovich write: "Russia and Germany, without asking Belarus, were dividing our land between themselves according to the peace of Brest-Litovsk signed by the Bolsheviks."⁶⁷ This situation demanded special efforts of the united political forces in order to save Belarusian wholeness. An attempt at this became the proclamation of the BPR on March 25, 1918. "The act of March 25 was a decisive protest against the division of Belarus between the Kaizerists and the Bolsheviks. The whole ethnic Belarusian community for the first time was proclaimed a sole democratic state."⁶⁸ For the alternative history, the symbolic meaning of that event is important, since it marked the beginning of Belarusian independent statehood. The aspirations of Belarusians to a national statehood had taken shape. "The independent Belarusian People's Republic was de facto recognized by Armenia, Austria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Turkey, Ukraine, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Estonia."⁶⁹ Apart from that, in Arlou and Saganovich's opinion, it was the proclamation of the BPR, that "however reluctantly, made Bolsheviks in Russia give Belarusian communists permission to create the BSSR."⁷⁰

The pro-Russian, pro-Soviet interpretation of the developments in the Belarusian past enables us to formulate the idea of Belarusianness that does not exclude a new union with Russia; on the contrary, such a union looks as an extension of the tradition. The union in this context is not perceived by the majority of Belarusian society as a threat to independence or a loss of sovereignty. In the official interpretation of the Belarusian past the initial and indivisible bond with Russia is not only a part of the Belarusian tradition, but also a basic element of Belarusianness. Because this version of history prevailed throughout the decades of the Soviet rule it has become a reason for its "genuineness." It is this history that has underlied the general nation-building strategy of the Soviet state and, as a result, has been internalized in the Soviet mode of Belarusianness. At the same time any "new" or previously unfamiliar interpretations of the past offered by the alternative history, immediately acquire the character of "external," alien to the Belarusian nation, despite their open Belaruso-centrism. Nevertheless the fact that another, non-Soviet version of Belarus's history was adopted as a legitimate and official one during the first years of Bela-

67 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 220.

68 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 220.

69 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 221.

70 Arlou and Saganovich, *Dziesiats' viakou belaruskai gistoryi 862–1918*, 221.

rusian independence has left its trace. Having lost the official status and an access to institutional resources of the state, the alternative history has preserved a definite place in the symbolic cultural space. Books by “alternative historians” are published, albeit without the state’s support. They can be bought in bookstores, borrowed from libraries, found on the Internet.⁷¹ As a result, in contradiction to the Soviet time, when the official version was the only one to be obtained by the mass readership, today in the informational and cultural space of Belarus both the interpretations of Belarusian history are available, though not equally, on demand in the educational system run by the state.

One of the basic meanings “encoded” in historical discourses is the culture-symbolical and political context within which the idea of Belarusianness is formulated. Although for the official Belarusianness this context is related to Russia in particular or to the Slavic cultural universe in general, for the alternative Belarusianness it is Europe-orientated. The way the Belarusian post-soviet development proceeded led to a peculiar situation. Two different versions of the Belarusian history led to the creation of two different ideas about the “Belarusian tradition” and two canons of the Belarusian national culture.⁷² System transformation aimed at the democratization and liberalization of the Belarusian society started on the official level in 1991 and were officially discontinued after 1994. The ideas of the Belarusian national development articulated by the Belarusian nationalists were removed from the official scene, but continued to operate as the alternative project of the Belarusianness, the alternative set of symbols and values, the alternative basis for the Belarusian commonness. “National culture as a mechanism for social communication in a public sphere,” Joanna Kurczewska writes, “is determined on the one hand by national tradition, and on the other hand by actual public discourse, particularly political discourse.”⁷³ However, as Belarusian example proves, the historical understanding of “national tradition” can become a matter of (geo)political choice. Historical discourses serve as a basis for a certain concept of Belarusianness; formulations and definition of this concept can be found in political discourses, where the national idea is articulated on the material of historical presentations of the Belarusian past.

71 For example, at <http://knihi.com>, <http://www.probelarus.ru>, <http://kamunikat.fontel.net>.

72 Polish sociologist Joanna Kurczewska following the ideas of Antonina Kłoskowska defines canon as a set of values, symbols, and myths that form the basis for commonness and political consensus. Joanna Kurczewska, “Kanon kultury narodowej,” in *Kultura narodowa i polityka*, ed. J. Kurczewska (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2000), 26.

73 Kurczewska, “Kanon kultury narodowej,” 49–50.

*Political Discourses of the Alternative
Belarusianness*

The manifestos, articles, and public presentations of Belarusian opposition politicians, as well as publications of political analysts, have been used as the basic material for the analysis of the political discourse of an alternative Belarusianness. Remarkably, this alternative Belarusianness does not exist as a single concept like the one made by the official ideology. One can speak of the alternative discourses of Belarusianness that breaks down into many images of a potentially different Belarus. Some authors see alternative Belarusianness in Europe, others see it at the meeting point of civilizations and consider Belarus to be a neutral and self-sufficient country. They are united by the renunciation of the Russian vector of the Belarusian idea cultivated by the authorities, and a consequent denial of the national status of the existing Belarusian state. In practice, the two alternative concepts of Belarusianness not only do not contradict each other, but often unite in their opposition to the pro-Russianness that dominates official culture and politics. To realize the idea of Belarus as a cultural bridge between Russia and the West it has to move away from Russia and toward Europe to reach neutrality. Thus, “Europe” becomes a symbol of alternative Belarusianness.

BELARUS IS EUROPE

The articulation of the European idea of Belarusianness is based on a number of principles. First principle is a liberal democratic interpretation of the nation. It means that “the nation” as a phenomenon can be realized only under a definite state structure. Andrei Suzdaltsev writes: “the present Republic of Belarus cannot be considered a national state of the Belarusian people [...] as only a state with a democratic state and political regimes can be called ‘national’.”¹ Stanislav Bogdankevich² gives a similar

1 Andrei Suzdaltsev, “Belorusskoe natsional’noe gosudarstvo,” *Nashe mnienie*, April 18, 2005, <http://www.nmnby.org/pub/180405/nation.html>.

2 The chief of Belarusian National Bank in 1991–1995, currently the head of the United Civic Party (Ob’ediniionnaia Grazhdanskaia Partia).

formulation of the national idea. He incorporates “the European political idea” into the content of Belarusianness: “We are convinced that the essence of the Belarusian national idea consists in the consolidation of complete sovereignty of the state and the right of our people to manage their own destiny, in the revival of its moral and spiritual formations, in the flourishing of national culture, in the formation of a prosperous civil society and a democratic rule-of-law state, with its ultimate aim to provide citizens with rights and liberties as well as a worthy level of life.”³

The main hindrance in realizing this national idea is the incumbent authorities who tear Belarus away from the West and bring it to the East. “Lukashenka’s socioeconomic realities of Belarus are more pertaining to the Asiatic model of production based on the predominant administrative power and its inseparability with property, on the economic and political dominion of bureaucracy.”⁴ In this manner, the genuine European idea of Belarusianness is sullied by the Asiatic formula of power. Like Stanislav Bogdankevich, the majority of the opposition authors proclaim liberal and democratic values as the basis for national Belarusian development, in contrast to the current regime. The basic thesis of this approach is that a nation cannot exist outside of, or without, liberal democracy, which is why Belarusians have to replace the political system of power in the country in order to become a “nation.” Adherents of this approach work in the sphere of political declaration and base their arguments on comparison with European countries.

Another source of “European Belarusianness” is built on the revival of Belarus’s European past. The alternative Belarusian historiography lays a solid foundation for the concept of European Belarusianness. In this context, the Belarusian nation is considered to be European, not because it claims for itself the category of nation in general, but because of its tradition of shared political and moral values.

One of the goals of the Belarusian People’s Front is the “renewal of the Belarusian cultural tradition on the basis of European moral values,” while the Europeanness and the general civilizational perspective of Belarus are provided by the Belarusian historical memory.⁵

The Belarusian political scientist Uladzimir Rouda writes that “from the moment of emergence of statehood on Belarusian lands in the ninth century and until the end of the eighteenth century Belarus had belonged

3 Stanislav Bogdankievich, “Belaruskaia natsional’naia idea,” *Adkrytaie gramadstva* 1 (6), 1999 <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/1.99/2.html>.

4 Bogdankievich, “Belaruskaia natsional’naia idea.”

5 Pragrama Gramadskaga ab’adnann’ia BNF “Adradzhenie,” <http://pbnf.org/statut.html>.

to the Western or, rather, to European civilization.”⁶ The western format of the Belarussian national idea is testified to by the Belarussian past, and practically all the features of the Western civilizational scale can be applied to Belarus or, more precisely, to its past. Examples of Europeanness abound in Belarussian history—the impact of the “classical cultural legacy” that penetrated into the territory of Belarus from the Byzantine and Roman empires; the development of Catholicism and Calvinism; and the separation of church and state, which was the standard in Belarus until its incorporation into the Russian empire.

The idea of law supremacy, of everyone’s submission to a single body of law runs through the 1588 Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Rouda notes, “some articles of the Statute, for instance, the death penalty for homicide, the presumption of innocence, the limitation of serfdom, the declaration of religious tolerance, exceeded the codes of law of the Western European states of the time.”⁷ Medieval Belarus enjoyed developed social pluralism, and in this respect the country was not inferior to Western Europe. Rouda concludes his historical review, “on the scale of Belarussian history there are nine centuries of European history on the one hand, and two centuries of ‘Asianness’ on the other hand,”⁸ and that is why, for Belarus, “the development of national self-consciousness means the revival of the very European tradition that underlies contemporary democracy in the West.”⁹

Many reputable members of the Belarussian elite share this orientation of the Belarussian national idea. Intellectual and politician Yuri Khadyka writes, “I think in today’s Belarus there is no real choice. In the conditions of a tense intercivilizational conflict, we have just one way—to the West, to Europe, that is where our legitimate place has been since the fifteenth century. The last two centuries, the hardest time for Belarussian independence, have only tempered the basic features of the national character [...] In other words, Belarussians are Europeans by their mentality. We have to hurry up in order to really join European civilization.”¹⁰ Uladzimir Arlou calls Belarus “an outpost of the Enlightenment era,”¹¹ which was as irrele-

6 Uladzimir Rouda, “Zapad est’ Zapad, Vostok est’ ili mogut li oshibatsia krupneishie politologi sovremennosti?” *Belorusy i Rynok*, July 26–August 2, 2004.

7 Rouda, “Zapad est’ Zapad.”

8 Rouda, “Zapad est’ Zapad.”

9 Rouda, “Zapad est’ Zapad.”

10 Yu. Khadyka, “Eurapeiskia kankstky belaruskaga mentalitetu,” *Filamaty* 4, no. 7 (2003), <http://kamunikat.org/filamaty.html?pubid=5584>.

11 Uladzimir Arlou, “U palone gistarychnykh mifau,” *Golas Radzimy*, June 15, 1995.

vant to Russia as the Reformation and the Counterreformation. As he put it, Belarus in all times has found itself “in the sphere of European history and European cultural values.”¹²

Political activist Ales’ Antsipenka also writes that Belarusianness connected the country with old Europe as far back as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Taking this statement into consideration, the way to Europe is just a way back home. In Antsipenka’s opinion Belarus is “a miniature model of Europe.”¹³ In this context the accentuation of Europeanness means that Belarusians are a nation whose formation has undergone all the stages of nation-building in Europe. Writer and philosopher Valiatsin Akudovich says that Belarusians have always been within the same ideological concept of the nation as all the other European nations. The phenomenon of “homo national” displaced “homo religious” as a result of the radical modernization process, and this change is a universal cultural, even civilizational, factor. “That is why it is strange to hear about ‘old’ and ‘young’ nations, namely in the historical respect, we, let us say, and Germans can be considered as siblings born one year apart.”¹⁴

Even “the most difficult issue” of Belarusian national consciousness—Russification and the abandonment of the Belarusian language—is viewed here in the context of the European analogy. “The state of the national language, which may seem peculiar from the standpoint of standard nation-building models, is not unique in the context of the universal background: America speaks the language of former colonizers, in Ireland and Belgium the language of former occupants exists along with the vernaculars,”¹⁵ says journalist and publicist Yuri Drakokhrust.

The history of Belarus, being European in its typological standards, naturally leads to its European present, that is to the European idea of Belarusianness. Akinchyts writes, “The Golden Age of Belarus, the sixteenth century, show us the proper way to be taken in order for Belarus to occupy its honorable place among peoples.”¹⁶ The project of Belarusianness is built on the foundation of European history, according to the principle that Belarusians are a nation just like Poles, Slovaks, and Czechs. This synony-

12 Arlou, “U palone gistarychnykh mifau.”

13 Ales’ Antsipenka, “Eurapeiskast’ i hrystsianskaia idea belaruskasci,” *Belarusika Albaruthenica* 2 (1992): 259.

14 “Z chago na vashu dumku pachynaetsa naciional’naia historia Belarusi i chym iana skonn’chytsa?” *ARCHE*, no. 2 (25) (2003): 5–6, <http://arche.bymedia.net/2003-2/apyt203.html>.

15 “Z chago na vashu dumku pachynaetsa natsiional’naia historia Belarusi i chym iana skonn’chytsa,” 6–7, <http://arche.bymedia.net/2003-2/apyt203.html>.

16 Akinchyts, *Zalaty vek Belarusi*, <http://knihi.com/bel/zalaty.html>.

mic series is opposed to the Russian—and, broader, to the pan-Slav—context of official Belarusianness.

The European image of Belarus is also formulated by *Nasha Niva*, a newspaper that became the main tool of the Belarusian national idea's articulation in the early twentieth century and which was resumed in 1991 with a similar philosophy and similar purposes. The articles related to historical issues published in *Nasha Niva* represent the pro-European interpretation of the past. They cover different periods of history, materials about the GDL and Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth,¹⁷ about the national movement and the BPR's creation,¹⁸ about the Soviet time and post-communism (the Soviet system on the whole and its Russocentrism are negatively estimated).¹⁹ All these publications serve to provide a basis for the national idea, and this national idea of *Nasha Niva*, as the Belarusian historian V. Shatalava writes, “is the idea of Belarusians' return to their historical sources, that is the Western European civilization and the history of its existence during many centuries within a democratic state (the GDL and later Commonwealth of the two peoples), with a high status of their language and traditions.”²⁰ The revived *Nasha Niva*, as V. Akudovich observed, “is culturologically located within the format of modern European mentality,”²¹ and that is why the mere fact of its existence actualizes the European context in the intellectual space of Belarus. The idea that the history of the Middle Ages can serve as a basis of “Europeanness” in the present time is popular not only with Belarusian authors. For instance, the Polish historian Jerzy Kłoczowski wrote that “the Middle Ages [...] have an absolutely decisive meaning for what we can in general call Europeanization, or “an entrance to Europe” of our lands and, at the same time, cre-

- 17 G. Saganovich, “Akupanty i partyzany,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 1, 1991; “Mova historii,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 1, 1991; “Fragment nenapisanai knihi,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 15, 1993; A. Dziarnovich, “Ordo Sancti Benedicti—Historia Ordena Benediktynau,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 4, 1991; idem, “Mauklivy klashtar Kniazia Sapegi,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 3, 1991; Yu. Sh., “Radzivily—bolsh chym bagatyia, bolsh chym magnaty, bolsh chym rod,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 6, 1992.
- 18 A. Ablazhei, “Pamiatsi Mirki,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 4, 1991; “S. D. Ivan Luckevich—arganizatar belaruskaga natsiianal'naga zhytsia,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 1, 1991.
- 19 A. Litvin, “Belaruskaia samaakhova,” *Nasha Niva*, no. 13, 1993.
- 20 V. F. Shatalava, “Natsiianal'naia idea na staronkakh “Nashai Nivy” 1991–1994 Gg.,” in *Sbornik materialov mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii XXI vek: aktualnye problemy istoricheskoi nauki* (Minsk: BGU, 2003), <http://www.hist.bsu.by/bel/nauka/konf/75%20let/konference/shatalava.htm>.
- 21 V. Akudovich, “Suchasnaia belaruskaia filazofia: historia Paustavan'nia,” in *Antalogia suchasnaga belaruskaga myslen'nia*, ed. V. Akudovich (St. Petersburg: Nevskii Prostor, 2003), 16–17.

ated the basis for their popular cultures.”²² In his work, he showed that the history of the Polish–Lithuanian–Russian Commonwealth proves that there was no cultural and civilizational gap between Central Europe and the neighboring Europe on the East, Byzantium-Slavonic Europe.²³

The retrospective formula of Belarusianness, as Petra Sadouski writes, has all the grounds for the claim to be European. The factual material of the Belarussian past provides wide possibilities for this. In Sadouski’s opinion, the founders of the Belarussian idea insufficiently use their history to base the national myths. As an example he mentions the battle of Orsha, the victory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania’s troops over the Grand Duchy of Moscow in 1514, or the participation of the Belarussians in the battle of Grunwald, the battle between joint forces of the Polish Kingdom and Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and Allies of the Teutons. Sadouski concentrates not on the Europeanness of Belarussians, but on the fact that “according to a great deal of cultural and historical evidence Europe ‘was present’ in Belarus in the era of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.”²⁴ This presence of Europe in Belarussian history can become a basis for a nation-forming myth.

Indeed, a strong side of the European version of Belarusianness is its historical basis. The history of the Belarussian lands within the GDL and Commonwealth provides enough possibilities for the designing of the national idea around the European concept. The alternative vision of history is aimed at a purposeful reorientation of Belarusianness to the West, and the return of the Belarussian nation to Europe. But behind this return, so much spoken about by the adherents of the European Belarusianness, there is a practically complete reformation of the Belarussian nation that had been formed in a different civilizational context and on different socio-systemic bases. This leads to a strange precedent: European Belarus is represented by a convincing historical projection with weak correlations to the political and cultural present. History essentially remains the major, if not the sole instrument of manifestation of this version of Belarusianness.

However, during the first years of independence there were many reasons for optimism: when adopted as a state idea, the concept of European Belarus received institutional support. In the early 1990s instead of the terms “western Rus” or “west Russian lands,” it was officially recommended to use “Belarus.”²⁵ At this time the official historiography legalized a new

22 Jerzy Kłoczowski, *Młodsza Europa* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 2003), 13.

23 Kłoczowski, *Młodsza Europa*, 21.

24 Piotra Sadouski, “Natsiiianal’naia identychnasts’: patriatychnaia i pazytyvistskaia interpretatsii (z paraunan’nem roznauzrostavykh etnasau),” *Filamaty* 1, no. 8 (2004), <http://kamunikat.net.iig.pl/www/czasopisy/filamaty/08/03.htm>.

25 M. Bich, “Ab natsiiianal’nai kanceptsyi gistoryi i gistarychnai adukatsii u Respublitsy Belarus’,” *Belaruski gistarychny chasopis*, no. 1 (1993): 19.

view on the origin of Belarusians, “the Belarusians were no longer viewed as a branch of the nationality of ‘ancient Rus,’ but as a Slavicized mixture of Slavic and Baltic tribes.”²⁶ This change of policy in relation to the ethno-genesis of Belarusians had a symbolic meaning. As Rainer Lindner writes, “The road from the myth about the ‘purest’ East-Slavic people to the myth ‘Slavicized Balts’ was a road to the West.”²⁷

In 1993, in the atmosphere of general enthusiasm about Belarusian state independence, Prime Minister Viacheslav Kebich spoke about the necessity of giving shape to the new self-consciousness of Belarusians: “It is not easy for us to shape our national self-awareness with national heritage we have received, not easy to reconvince our contemporaries and successors that we have a history of our statehood [...] That is why any efforts, state and public initiatives, to revive our national history are so necessary and valuable.”²⁸ In 1993 the editor-in-chief of the new journal *Belaruski Gistarychny Chasopis* wrote: “We openly and sincerely state that our policy and the main goal of the journal will be to contribute to the process of national rebirth and deepening the national consciousness of the Belarusian people [...] This is the national policy, enshrined in a series of legislative acts of the Republic of Belarus.”²⁹

All these events displayed the beginning of a new epoch in the state understanding of history and an actualization of the new idea of the Belarusianness. Many had the feeling that this turn towards national values was permanent and that “the ruinous for the historical education of Belarusi-ans, the unnatural imperialistic Russia-centered direction in teaching history will be displaced by a different one, which is useful to its people.”³⁰ However, in 1995 a new campaign had begun, which Lindner called “denationalization of the Belarusian past.”³¹ The campaign called for reversion to the idea of Belarusianness internalized in the Belarusian self-awareness in the Soviet time. Devoid of institutional support or further representation in the official cultural and public sphere, the idea of European Belarus was relegated to the margins of cultural and political life.

26 Zaprudnik, “Belarus: in Search of National Identity,” 120.

27 Lindner Rainer, “Natsiianal’nyia i prydvornya gistoryki ‘lukashenkauskai’ Belarusi,” *Gistarychny almanakh*, no. 4, 2001, http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/almanach/04/04zvonku_lindnier.htm.

28 *Zwiazda*, 23 December 1993; cited in Zaprudnik, “Belarus: in Search of National Identity,” 120.

29 *Belaruski gistarychny chasopis* 1 (1993): 5, cited in Zaprudnik, “Belarus: in Search of National Identity,” 120.

30 Hrytskevich, *Gistoria i mify*, <http://knihi.com/historyja/mify.html>.

31 Lindner, “Natsiianal’nyia i prydvornya gistoryki ‘lukashenkauskai’ Belarusi,” http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/almanach/04/04zvonku_lindnier.htm.

 BELARUSIANS AS AN “IN-BETWEEN NATION”

Another version of the alternative Belarusianness actively developed by the oppositional political discourse can be conventionally signified as “an in-between nation.” In the situation when the prevailing position in society and the state is the anti-Western idea, the idea of a neutral and self-sufficient Belarus and the idea of European Belarus do not contradict each other—they become different formulae of an anti-official rhetoric. In his book *Belarus’ na rostaniakh* (Belarus at Crossroads, allusion to Yakub Kolas’s classic Belarusian novel *Na rostaniakh* (*At Crossroad*)) Piotr Krauchanka³² writes that the Belarusian people for a long time have belonged to European civilization. “Where are we, if not in Europe? Just look at the map or turn over the pages of a history textbook. And the point is not only because we are geographically located in the center of Europe. We are historically European, with the traditional intranational tolerance, with the absence of enmity among religious confession. We had had the Magdeburg Law on our territory before many other countries. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania—the motherland of our ancestors—was one of the first European-style powers. Didn’t European wars occur on our territory, didn’t many knots of European history get tied and untied in our Belavezha?”³³ Interesting, in reply to the question “What place in modern world should be occupied by Belarus, where should we start going—to Europe or to Russia?” Krauchenka sticks to a more neutral position. “Perhaps, the best reply is given by our poet Maxim Luzhanin: ‘You don’t have to be either Eastern or Western—just be yourself!’”³⁴

Indeed, the central premise of this understanding of Belarusianness is that Belarus belongs to neither the West nor the East. Only on this principle of non-alignment will it be possible to build the Belarusian nation-state, according to Vasili Leonov, the organizer of the social movement “For a new Belarus.” The historical experience of Belarusians being part of different state unions had become a kind of political norm, which is why the disintegration of the USSR offered the unusual possibility for Belarusian state independence. In Leonov’s opinion, the project of a new union with Russia, or the idea of Belarus joining the European Union, prevents true national development, as either option would deprive Belarusians of a national initiative: in either case, someone else would shape Belarusian destiny. As an alternative, he suggests the idea of a national state of Belarus as a

32 Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (1992–1993).

33 Piotr Krauchanka, *Belarus’ na rosstaniakh* (Vilnius: Instytut Belarussystyki, 2007), 279.

34 Krauchanka, *Belarus’ na rosstaniakh*, 350.

state “in itself and for itself.” “First of all, we have to stop, look around, and say to ourselves: we are Belarusians, here is our home, and this is where we must live. There is no sense in the whole nation going to the West or to the East. We should not mindlessly copy the Western or Eastern experience. We have to put our own Belarusian home in order by taking local conditions into account, in accordance with our traditions and mentality.”³⁵

An opinion poll conducted among members of the Belarusian elite by the Independent Institute of Socioeconomic and Political Studies in November–December 2006, shows that the idea of joining either the West or the East is not supported by the Belarusian elite, as they see the major national interest in state independence (Table 9).

TABLE 9. “What are, in your opinion, the national interests of the Republic of Belarus?” (%; no more than 3 answers)

	All those polled	Employed in state sector	Employed in non-state sector
Independence, sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus	80	90	70
Democratization of society	50	37	63
Observance of human rights	42	47	37
Improved level of life of the population	37	50	23
Integration into Europe	27	23	30
Economic reforms	27	13	40
Development of the national culture	10	10	10
Improved demographic situation	8	13	3
Unification with Russia	7	13	—

Note: the opinion poll of leaders and experts (over sixty policymakers, media leaders, scientists, and businessmen, conducted by the IISEPS sociologists).

Source: *Novosti IISEPS Bulletin* 4, no. 42 (2006): 75, <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet06-4.html>.

35 Leonov, *Rabota nad oshibkami*, 74.

At first glance, this desire to maintain independence from West and East and to follow Belarus's own way, contradicts the world practice: small political subjects, to which Belarus can be ascribed, traditionally experience lack of internal resources to develop and assert "one's own way." Their successful survival strategies, as a rule, boil down to the selection of the most advantageous ally. Nevertheless, the idea of Belarus as belonging to neither to the East nor to the West is deeply implanted in the consciousness of the Belarusian elite.

One of the explanations of this phenomenon can be found in the historical experience of Belarusians. The idea of Belarusian cultural territory as a neutral one, not belonging entirely either to the West or to the East, but at the same time connected with both was formulated during the early twentieth century. The poet and thinker Ignat Abdziralovich wrote in 1921: "Belarus since the tenth century has actually been a battlefield of the two directions of European or, rather, Aryan culture—western and eastern."³⁶ It means that neither side has complete power over Belarus, and Belarus is characterized by neither open resistance nor complete submission. "Up until the present time the Belarusian people have not supported either the eastern or the western waves; letting them roll over their heads instead [...] Fluctuation between the West and the East and lack of genuine inclination to either side is the main attribute of the Belarusian people's history."³⁷

In Belarusianness we can find a "mild" combination of separate features of the two opposites. As Ignat Abdziralovich writes, the Belarusian national idea is based on the rejection of the two extreme, "messianic" forms of either Eastern Byzantism or Western individualism. The former contains the idea of absolute and unified power, the unification of public life, collectivism, and usurping ambitions. The latter connotes the fragmentation of public life in which no authority has real power, leading to an endless search for an often unattainable compromise among parties that possess equal rights. According to Abdziralovich, in Belarus the better aspects of the two cultural and historical types are synthetically combined based on original forms of public life and culture.³⁸

The positive aspect of the Belarusian place between two civilizations is reflected in the idea of Belarusianness as a harmonious conjunction of eastern and western values. In its turn, it made some authors formulate a special

36 Ignat Abdziralovich, *Advechnym shliakham, dasledziny belaruskaga svetagliadu* (Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika, 1993), <http://pawet.narod.ru/book/philosophy/1.html>.

37 Abdziralovich, *Advechnym shliakham*.

38 Abdziralovich, *Advechnym shliakham*.

Belarusian civilizational mission in the late twentieth century. Philosopher Uladimir Konan, the author of numerous works devoted to the Belarusian national idea, writes: “Probably the historic mission of Belarus is in overcoming the one-sided ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ poles,”³⁹ “the historic destiny of Belarus is to build a cultural and geopolitical ‘bridge’ between the East and the West, between Russian Eurasia, on the one hand, and Western and Central Europe, on the other hand.”⁴⁰ In part the dependent position of Belarus within state formations in the Middle Ages and modern history has become a reason for the weakness of the national tradition. But this weakness can be interpreted as a virtuous neutrality that has caused Belarusians’ reluctance to take this or that side in the clash of civilizations.⁴¹

Many political and cultural activists of the alternative Belarus see the source of its political potential in Belarusian ambivalence, and its cultural connection with the East and the West alike. Genadz Pranevich writes about the intermediary mission of Belarus as the sole true capital—the symbolic capital of the Belarusian state. “Not only by our tractors, potash fertilizers, the intellectual and trained workforce can we attract and interest our Slavic and Baltic neighbors [as well as] all Europeans, but first of all by the prospect of building in the center of Europe a reliable and durable bridge from the west to the east and from the north to the south, by the unique national mentality, the talent to reconcile, unite, and bring together individuals, peoples, cultures, and religions.”⁴²

Mikhail Marinich, a former minister of the external economic relations of the Republic of Belarus (1994–1998), deputy of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus (1990–1994), and currently a member of the political opposition

39 Uladimir Konan, “Belarus’ na miazhy tysiachagoddziau: shtrykhi da gistarychnaga, politychnaga i dukhounaga partretu natsyi,” *Acta Albaruthenica* 2 (2001): 163.

40 Uladimir Konan, “Belarускаia ideia i misia Belarusi,” *Belarускаia dumka*, no. 4 (1992): 6–25.

41 Another Belarusian author of that period, Uladimir Samoila in his work “O staroi i novoi unii,” (About the Old and the New Union) interprets the “meeting” of two civilizations as a clash, a war of two imperialisms—the Russian and the Polish. This civilization clash of the West and the East had led to the mutual annihilation of the positive content both of the West and the East, which is characteristic of Belarus. “Both neighbors of Belarus have led a mortal struggle, for five odd centuries, in the first place for the land and soul of the Belarusian people, submitting the former and the latter, as an object and field of the struggle, to perpetual and systematic devastation [...] They both saw the country as just a “vacant place” for themselves, and the people, the natural owner of the country, just material for exploitation and assimilation.” Uladimir Samoila, “O staroi i novoi unii,” in *Belarускаia dumka*, ed. Jury Garbinski (Warsaw: Slawistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy; 1998), 159–60.

42 Genadz Pranevich, “Mentalitet u sisteme kaardynat natsiianal’naga byts’tsia,” *Adkrytaie gramadstva* no. 2 (11) (2001), <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/3.html>.

wrote that "Belarus should become a conductor of European values in Russia."⁴³

Pavel Seviarynets, the leader of the youth political movement Malady Front,⁴⁴ and the author of several books about Belarus, described its mission as a nation on the bridge: "The concept of Belarus as a gigantic strategic economic and geopolitical bridge between the West and Russia, Europe and Asia, the Baltic and the Black seas regions gives it a unique possibility for a genuine neutrality, a friendly openness to the West and the East, with formation of an axis of our own financial and technological, as well as cultural, interests."⁴⁵ His image of Belarus is of an ambivalent country with a special mission in the East and in the West, "to enlighten and educate huge Russia, to stir up Eastern Europe, to give tolerance and inspiration to the West is on our consciousness."⁴⁶ In the East, in relations with Russian or rather with the empires that had been built on the territory of the eastern neighbor the mission of Belarus is to facilitate the disintegration of empires and to "purify" Russia. "Save Russia!—is the slogan worthy of powerful Belarusian strategy."⁴⁷ According to Seviarynets, in favor of this special mission testifies the fact that in Belarus there had been many projects that had come to pass, which had been ruinous for the imperial plans of great Russia: the first congress of RSDRP (Russian Social Democratic Revolutionary Party); the abdication of czar Nicholas II; the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; the Belovezha agreement to dissolve the USSR.

All of these events are somehow related to Belarus, and all of them have had a destructive impact on Russia's imperial ambitions. They are a manifestation of the Belarusian mission in the East. This mission is stipulated by the "Westernness" of Belarus. At the same time, the destiny of the Western strategy of the post-communist revival in Belarus also has a specific development. This fate is inscribed in the Belarusian national idea. Its "Easternness" prevents it. "Belarus, which is placed between Europe and Russia, is not to become a domestic, decent Central European country."⁴⁸ The internal conflict of the Belarusian national idea is a result of such a

43 Mikhail Marinich, "Ne upustit' shans," *Novosti IISEPS Bulletin'* no. 2(28) (2003), <http://www.iiseps.org/bullet03-2.html>.

44 Deputy chief of the BPF (1999–2003); leader of the "Young Front" (1999–2004).

45 P. Seviarynets, "Novaia gistoria," *Nasha Niva*, December 2001, <http://seviarynets.net/index.php?newsid=18>.

46 P. Seviarynets, *Natsiianal'naia ideia. Fenamenalogia Belarusi* (Minsk: Izd. I. P. Logvinov) 2005, <http://seviarynets.net/category/book>.

47 Seviarynets, *Natsiianal'naia ideia*.

48 Seviarynets, "Novaia gistoria," <http://seviarynets.net/index.php?newsid=18>.

duality. That is why the Belarussian national idea, writes Seviarynets “is the idea of a long-suffering, great country [...] which is always in pain and which will, most probably, never become a happy one.”⁴⁹

The intermediate position on the civilization divide often becomes a fundamental truth for the Belarussian national idea. It is a cause of the specific Belarussian mentality, which “is to a great extent determined by the universal natural geographical, geopolitical and civilizational-cultural intermediateness.”⁵⁰ This is what makes the Belarussian people “European” in the modern sense of the word: “Here the unique experience of common life and peaceful coexistence is developed for different peoples, religions, cultures, ethnic groups and denominations. Toleration has been the spiritual foundation of our existence, it most vividly and consistently highlighted the sense and content of our national idea that had taken shape as early as the sixteenth century, and on the eve of the nineteenth century it turned completely consonant with the expectations of the best European thinkers concerning united Europe.”⁵¹

The intermediate position also determines the specific character of the Belarussian cultural tradition. As Ihar Babkou writes, “Belarus of the last two centuries has appeared and formed in this dark space in between [...]”⁵² This in-between position characterizes a specific nature of the transcultural Belarussian tradition, which “comprises heterogeneous elements. Its texts were written in different languages and belong to different types of civilizations [...] and occur in several traditions.”⁵³

In this kind of context a specific effort is required for the preservation or, to be more exact, for the designing of the integrity of culture, tradition, and nation. One of the ways to achieve such integrity is to establish a distance in respect to those cultures and traditions in which the transcultural nation appears to be involved. The distance can be either long or short; however, it should exist as a sign of a break between Belarussian and the foreign, or non-Belarussian cultural experience. This distance, with regard to the West and the East, becomes a peculiar point of reference in the calculation of Belarusianness in alternative political and cultural discourses.

49 Seviarynets, “Novaia gistoria.”

50 Pranevich, “Mentalitet u sisteme kaardynat natsiianal’naga byts’cia.”

51 Pranevich, “Mentalitet u sisteme kaardynat natsiianal’naga byts’cia.”

52 Ihar Babkou, “Etyka pamezzha, transkulturalizm iak belaruski dos’ved,” in *Antalogia suchasnaga belaruskaga myslen’nia*, ed. V. Akudovich and A. Antsipenka (St. Petersburg: Nevskii Prostor, 2003), 68.

53 Babkou, “Etyka pamezzha, transkulturalizm iak belaruski dos’ved,” 74.

As early as 1921 Yanka Kupala⁵⁴ created a literary image of this neutrality of “the border” in his play *Tuteishia* [The Locals]. This play is frequently perceived as an articulation of Belarusian cultural identity. Belarusian self-determination is achieved by means of deidentifying with the Russian and the Polish context, resulting in the localization of identity outside of any cultural traditions, in the extremely reduced space of “here.” “Tuteishia” was also the name of the independent young writers’ association created in 1986, which united the people inspired by the Belarusian national revival idea.

A similar idea of “being from here, being local and true Belarusian” is reflected in the song called “I was born here” (lyrics by Siargei Sokolov-Voush, sung by Dmitrii Voitiushkevich), which became a sort of national youth anthem. This song, “The Hymn of Belarus,” was mentioned more often than others in the Internet youth forums devoted to the discussion of an alternative national anthem of Belarus (<http://mensk.by/forum>). The song was the beginning of a musical project with the same title—a series of concerts, from which an album of alternative patriotic songs was issued. In 2001 the concert “I was born here” gave rise to the political campaign with the slogan “Make a choice,” aimed at oppositional mobilization of Belarusian youth during the presidential election campaign.

This song was also a response to the appeal of the Belarusian authorities formulated by the president of Belarus: those who do not like “our authorities and our country” are free to leave. “I was born here and I will live here”—these words from the song sound as a declaration of the right to existence of an alternative understanding of Belarusianness in the country where the official discourse aims at monopolization of the Belarusian nation’s concept.

The play “The locals,” by Yanka Kupala, as well as the song “I was born here,” show a peculiar fact: in the Belarusian context, the usual opposition between the national and the local as competing sources of identity ceased to operate. Indeed, the phrase “I was born here,” for Belarusian youth, sounds like a declaration of Belarusian identity, built on the basis of its attribution to territory, despite external cultural and political influences. It is by reducing national Belarusian identity to local Belarusianness, that this identity can distance itself from the Russianness in the East, and Polishness in the West, in order to differentiate its existence in people’s mind.

54 Yanka Kupala (1882–1942) was one of the members of the Belarusian national revival movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, who later became the classic of national literature in Soviet Belarus.

*National Ideology of the
Belarusian State as a Political Articulation
of Official Belarusianness*

In alternative discourses, the Republic of Belarus governed by A. G. Lukashenka is presented as an anti-Belarusian and anti-national formation. Nevertheless, many authors who observe the developments in the country from the outside note that the process of intense institutionalization and reification of Belarusian nationhood has taken place during the country's independence period. There is a national idea behind this process: "in no area Belarus has moved so far during its years of independence as in the mobilization on the ground of the national idea," writes the Belarusian political scientist Sergei Nikoliuk.¹ On the one hand, one can speak about the development of national self-awareness due to the establishment of a sovereign national state. "Formation of the Belarusian nation is taking place now, before our eyes, on the territory we have acquired after the disintegration of the USSR. It takes place, first of all, because the people who now live within the boundaries of modern Belarusian state begin to form mutual interests whose realization can be beneficial to all of them, irrespective of their ethnic identity or language they speak. The very fact of the independent Belarusian state existence makes us more and more Belarusians from year to year."²

On the other hand, many authors admit that this is also the result of the policy conducted by the authorities. The particular role of the Belarusian president in "nationalization" of Belarusians, has been commented on, as he "has probably done more for the consciousness of the independent Belarusian nation than any Popular Front or the most convinced nationalists could do."³ In this sense, when the Belarusian president is seen as

1 Sergei Nikoliuk, "Vozvrashchenie bludnoi docheri. Poisk natsionalnoi identichnosti ovladevaet umami sootchestvennikov," *Belorusy i rynok*, May 24–31, 2004, <http://www.belmarket.by/index.php?article=22032&year=2004>.

2 "Demokratia i natsionalizm kak alfa i omega politicheskogo processa," *Adktytaie gramadstva* no. 2 (11), 2001, <http://data.minsk.by/opensociety/2.01/5.html>.

3 Fedor Lukianov, "Belorussia kotoruiu my ne ponimaem," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* no. 47, 2006, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2006/47/lu12.html>.

“a dictator without an ideology, only with a business plan”⁴ this is not quite true. The ideology of the Belarusian state is in its “national project,” based on its interpretation of Belarusianness.

Certainly the format of the Belarusian national idea, propagated via official discourse, essentially differs from the Belarusianness conceptualized in alternative discourses. It is based “not on the idea of national revival by which the leaders of the national democratic movements of the 1980s–90s were guided, but on the idea of the national exclusiveness of Belarus as a model of a state-society, its unique character devoid of any outside influence.”⁵

Some authors recognize the existence of the official national project of the Belarusian government, but with the understanding that behind it there is little more than a simple aspiration to preserve its own status and power. The nationalization of Belarusian political life by the authorities is related to the desire “to resort to the national awareness of the population as a sort of barrier against absorption of national sovereignty by Russia, which would unavoidably reduce the status and the role of Belarusian bureaucrats, including Lukashenka.”⁶ In the context of the confrontation of the Belarusian President with the Kremlin, Lukashenka is portrayed as a fighter for Belarusian independence. According to Antonovich, a former party nomenclature member, “our president Lukashenka acquired a proper place in history, because he did not ‘give in’ and did not allow to incorporate Belarus into Russia when he was urged to do so by Moscow ‘liberals’ and when Belarus was actually faced with the ultimatum—gas or sovereignty—sovereignty for the Belarusian people became a mature political value, which it obtained after centuries of demand.”⁷ Russian political scientist Anastasia Mitrofanova also believes that Belarusian official nationalism has a forced character and, in fact, appears as a result of lost political game. “Relations with the West are deteriorated, and the integration with Russia is held back. It contributes to the creation of the besieged fortress consciousness. But the Belarusian nation, as well as the Soviet people, is built on an ideological basis.”⁸ However, the result is the same, even if the true

4 Tom Stoppard, “Accidental Tyranny,” *Guardian*, October 1, 2005, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1581238,00.html>.

5 Lukianov, “Belorussia kotoruiu my ne ponimaem,” <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2006/47/lu12.html>.

6 Zaprudnik, “Belarus: in Search of National Identity,” 122.

7 Ivan Antonovich, “Mnie sniatstva sny ab Belarusi,” *Nasha Niva*, March 16, 2007.

8 Anastasia Mitrofanova, “Khrustalnyi sosud ideologii, ili belorusskii proekt,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 3 (47) (2006), <http://www.nz-online.ru/index.phpml?aid=80011760>.

purpose for strengthening the national feeling of Belarusians by official methods is to make the position of the current regime more secure. Belarusians become stronger as carriers of the Belarusian national idea, and the phrase “our country” (*nasha kraina* in Belarusian, *nasha strana* in Russian), which prior to 1991 meant the Soviet Union, now means Belarus.⁹

Those Belarusians who support the government also display a high status of identification by means of their belonging to the country, and a high “pride index” for being citizens of Belarus. As a matter of fact, these data mean that a significant part of Belarusians accept the idea of Belarusian-ness offered by the official political discourse.

The speeches and statements of the president of Belarus, in which he sets forth the basic provisions of state ideology, as well as monographs and textbooks on ideology, provide a concise image of “official Belarusian-ness.” In all these texts there is a reference to the Belarusian way of development, Belarusian tradition, and characteristics of the Belarusian mentality. All these are part of the foundation of the official concept of the Belarusian nation.

The ideology of the state started to be developed in the 1990s, stimulating academic and scientific exploration of the subject.¹⁰ Three basic values of this ideology were formulated: strong presidential power, a socially oriented economy, and Christian (or, to be precise, Orthodox) values. In public space, the ideology of the Belarusian state emerged in 2003, when it became not only a theoretical, but also a practical issue.

On March 27, 2003, the President of Belarus spoke at the seminar “On Measures to Improve the Ideological Work” for senior ideological management, where he stated his vision of a new state ideology. The ideology preserved the main theoretical theses, apart from several relatively new ideas (such as Belarus’ messianic role as spiritual leader within the East Slavic civilization). An additional stress was made only on the applied character of the ideology. It should work to educate citizens. The necessity of teaching ideology to students, popularizing its values by means of the state-run mass media, was also discussed.

Characterizing the format of the Belarusian state ideology V. Bobrovich writes that “in the traditional sense it is not a political ideology. According

9 Zaprudnik, “Belarus: in Search of National Identity,” 118.

10 M. A. Ermolitchki et al., *Model utoichivogo razvitiia Respubliki Belarus': ideologia, sistema upravleniia, mekhanizm realizatsii v soiuze s Rossiei*. (Minsk: Tekhnoprint, 1999); “Ideologiia belorusskoi gosudarstvennosti: problemy teorii i praktiti,” *Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii*, November 1998, Minsk.

to its content, it is much closer to such concepts as an 'ideology of statehood' or a 'state idea'.¹¹ Indeed, constant appeals to the Belarusian people, their traditions and national developments blur the conceptual boundaries between national ideology and the ideology of the state. For example, *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, a mouthpiece for the state, uses such concepts as "ideology of statehood" and "national ideology" as synonyms.¹² According to the newspaper, state ideology is the way out of the crisis of national identity, in which Belarusians have found themselves since the disintegration of the Soviet Union.¹³ The ideology of the Belarusian state is "called to strengthen the sociopolitical consolidation of society, to become a national force able to unite the country's citizens into an integrated Belarusian people."¹⁴

The concept "national" is widely used in the official Belarusian discourse, in contradictory ways. The word "national" is constantly present in the media and is part of names of different public institutions and services: the National Library, the National Academy of Sciences, First National (the name of the Belarusian TV channel), the National television and radio broadcasting company, national security, and cultural national legacy. All these are meant to confirm and emphasize the national status and sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus.

At the same time, the President speaks about the "open nationalism of the Belarusian opposition" as something alien to the Belarusian people.¹⁵ "Nationalism is absolutely unacceptable to our people. That is because internally we are the most internationally minded people."¹⁶ These statements, however, are combined in the official rhetoric with claims of the national idea as an essential aspect of the state life, because its internalization is a guarantee for a successful development of the country. The same text declares: "The national idea should be based on people's awareness of statehood and the primacy of national interests. And such awareness is developed throughout the whole life of the individual. Since birth, through kindergarten, school, university everyone should understand such

11 V. Bobrovich, "Gosudarstvennaia ideologiia *pro et contra*," *Filamaty* 3, no. 6 (2003): 58–59.

12 "Mirovozzrencheskaia sostavliaiushchaia," *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, September 25, 2003.

13 "My—kto eto?" *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, May 12, 2004.

14 S. N. Kniazev, et al., *Osnovy ideologii belorusskogo gosudarstva*, Uchebnoie posobie dlia vuzov (Minsk: Akademia Upravleniia pri Prezidente Belarusi, 2004), 225.

15 Stenogramma press-konferentsii Prezidenta A. G. Lukashenka dlia predstavitelei rosiiskikh regionalnykh SMI, November 24, 2005, <http://www.president.gov.by/press18888.html#doc>.

16 S. D. Laptenok, "Belarus'—voiennyi i nraivennyi forpost," <http://www.president.gov.by/press14033.html#doc>.

concepts as the Motherland, patriotism, the people, history, culture not just logically, and to absorb them in the soul. Without it it's impossible to preserve the state and to build a good life."¹⁷

A passage of this type would look equally at home in texts by oppositional Belarusian nationalists, as would the appeal "Let the flame of freedom and independence of the Fatherland never go out of our hearts"¹⁸ found on the official Web page of the Belarusian president. However, the official context sets its own parameters in the understanding of the national idea. There is "good" and "bad" nationalism traced in the official rhetoric of Belarusian authorities. Without the "good" nationalism it is impossible to build and preserve the state. (Valery Mikheiev names patriotism [the Soviet version of nationalism] "a spiritual core of the Belarusian people.")¹⁹ Behind the "bad" nationalism there is political opposition, which is influenced and supported by the West (the fact that makes it possible to declare it an external, and therefore alien, notion to the Belarusian nation). When the Belarusian president declares: "This opposition is a pro-Western nationalism opposition," it sounds like a verdict: it is not Belarusian, as it is created and financed by the West.²⁰

The official Belarusian national idea is based on a few fundamental guidelines. It stresses its own tradition and history; it has a positive philosophy of the Soviet experience on the whole, and a recognition of the necessity to reproduce its components in an independent Belarus; it carries an appeal for Slavic unity, with reliance on Russian culture as a counterbalance to Western values; and it refers to the peculiar mentality and special qualities of Belarusian people (such as collectivism), which form the basis of a Belarus–Europe relationship. The idea of social equality, which according to the official ideology is a truly Belarusian idea, and is the backbone of socialism, plays an important role in the counterbalance to the Western civilization and capitalism. This idea is rooted in the symbolic matrix of Belarusianness, which had been articulated as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the first stage of Belarusian national development. The official discourse makes use of the fact that the Belarusians had never existed as a formal nation within capitalist formation.

17 S. D. Laptenok, "Belarus'—voiennyi i nraivstvennyi forpost," <http://www.president.gov.by/press14033.html#doc>.

18 S. D. Laptenok, "Belarus'— voiennyi i nraivstvennyi forpost," <http://www.president.gov.by/press14033.html#doc>.

19 V. M. Mikheiev, *Ideologiia: razmyshleniia i vyvody* (Minsk: Tonpik, 2004), 219.

20 Stenogramma press-konferentsii Prezidenta A. G. Lukashenka, <http://www.president.gov.by/press18888.html#doc>.

Thus, if the lack of a capitalist social structure in the post-Soviet period was seen by Miroslav Hroch as a cause and aspiration for Eastern European nationalists to transform society into a capitalist system with a capitalist class,²¹ for the official Belarusian ideology it becomes the motivation to oppose such transformations.

As Kurczewska writes, "The significance of the national community is determined above all by its presence in primary socialization, and also by the fact that it is predisposed to cultivating nativeness, blaming alienness, and preserving a monolithic vision of the past, which is conducive to the stability and compulsory character of a canon."²² Stating its Belarusian-ness, the official ideology widely uses the metaphor of "kinship:" "The ideology of the state should be built on its own foundation. Being in his senses a Frenchman will not want to adopt the American way of life, a German the Russian way, and so on. Each nation grows and develops on its native ideological ground. We will do the same."²³

"The native-ours" is aggressively opposed to the "foreign-western." It is in this rigid opposition that the independence of the Belarusian state is maintained in the official discourse. "We have built a democratic social state, relying not on a foreign single-type project, but on historical traditions and our people's desire, because we trust in creativity of the people, their wisdom, diligence and courage."²⁴ A moral reasoning with regard to their own country is also introduced. It is an appeal to "the country as a family," which makes it possible to differentiate its native and foreign values in the most understandable and emotional way. In his report on ideology President Lukashenka states: "It is senseless to copy someone's values and aims on the basis of the fact, that this or that country is strong and rich at the present time. In fact, we do not abandon our parents, though they are not millionaires."²⁵

The thesis about one's own experience, culture, and the foundations of statehood requires a more solid support and reasoning—and such reasoning is provided by a "tradition." "One should be careful with such borrowings as ideals, values and aims. Our own traditions, ideas and values, aims

21 Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation," 90.

22 Kurczewska, "Kanon kultury narodowej," 30.

23 A. G. Lukashenka, "Doklad na seminarie rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov po ideologicheskoi rabote," March 27, 2003, <http://www.president.gov.by/press29213.html#doc>.

24 A. G. Lukashenka, "Istoricheskii vybor Respubliki Belarus. Lektsia v BGU," March 14, 2003, <http://www.president.gov.by/press29279.html#doc>.

25 Lukashenka, "Doklad na seminarie rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov po ideologicheskoi rabote."

and purposes, make the 'backbone' of our people. They are not made up, but gained through the suffering of our people; they are the result of the natural adaptation of society to the natural and social environment."²⁶

An appeal to "the natural way" of our own values' formation in the discourse of official Belarusianness is necessary for strengthening the effect of alienation from any alternative ways of its definition. Thus, according to the president, the ideology of liberalism is deeply alien to the Belarusian people's mentality. As a counterbalance to Western individualism, he says, we should be guided by collectivism and mutual aid, social trust, and respectful relations between the state and the people.

The source of these ideological principles, in the view of Evgeni Babosov, the author of *Osnovy ideologii sovremennogo gosudarstva* (*The Bases of the Ideology of the Contemporary State*), is the mental basis of the Belarusian people, such as patriotism, collectivism, kindness, as well as self-esteem and personal independence.²⁷ Babosov also pays attention to the combination of patience and forbearance, on the one hand, and intolerance to any oppression, on the other hand.²⁸ In the official ideology "peoplehood" and collectivism appear as integral features of Belarusianness. "Collectivism is, so to say, something national, something that is in Belarusians' blood, and it is something that should be kept and strengthened."²⁹ It is the collectivist mentality that is viewed as one of the main reasons for the failure of liberal reforms in Belarus. Western strategies of liberal reforms "did not correspond to the collectivist mentality in the post-Soviet space, moral principles and traditions, constant search for the good and justice."³⁰ Western values are alien to "Belarusians, people of community, who do not accept absolutization of private property."³¹

The idea of Slav unity also makes a reliable foundation for Belarusian ideology, and in its description the official discourse frequently uses organic metaphors. Although nationalists aim at "cutting off the Belarusian branch from the common spiritual Slav tree,"³² the Belarusian authorities

26 Lukashenka, "Doklad na seminaru rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov po ideologicheskoi rabote."

27 E. M. Babosov, *Osnovy ideologii sovremennogo gosudarstva* (Minsk: Amalfeia, 2004), 213–19.

28 Babosov, *Osnovy ideologii sovremennogo gosudarstva*, 220–21.

29 Babosov, *Osnovy ideologii sovremennogo gosudarstva*, 220–21.

30 A. V. Kazlovich, "Unutrypalitychnae zyc'ce i miznarodnyia adnosiny," in *Belarus na miazhy tysiachagoddziau*, ed. A. P. Vaitovich et al. (Minsk: Belaruskaja entsyklapedia, 2000), 276.

31 Lukashenka, "Doklad na seminaru rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov po ideologicheskoi rabote."

32 Lukashenka, "Doklad na seminaru rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov po ideologicheskoi rabote."

see their mission in preservation of this tree. All integration efforts of the president are focused on it. "Ideas of the Belarusian statehood are closely connected with the ideas of Slav unity, brotherhood and cooperation of the peoples."³³ In this context, when Belarusianness is placed on the territory of Slav civilization, ideas of the union with other states "inside" this civilization do not contradict, but develop an idea of Belarusian independence: "the political strategy of the President of Belarus A. G. Lukashenka is expressed in his policy, which deals with the creation of the union state of Belarus and Russia. One should qualify this strategy as historically justified and utterly corresponding to the Belarusian national idea."³⁴

The geopolitically predetermined idea of Belarusian tradition is represented in the assessment of the Belarusian past. Those periods of history, when Belarusians together with the Poles or Lithuanians were members of the same states, are declared to be alien to the Belarusian tradition, which is more linked to the periods of history related to czarist or Soviet Russia. Considering such ideological directives, as Belarusian author Aleksander Feduta notices, it is not surprising that in the official history textbooks "all fighters against the czarist oppression, including the national hero of Belarus, Kastus Kalinouski,³⁵ are presented as 'Poles,' and their activities are looked upon as a result of the influence of Catholicism, but the notorious count Mikhail Murav'iov³⁶ who lives in the people's memory as the 'hangman,' was posthumously characterized as a talented administrator."³⁷ Also, the decision made by the president to withdraw the award named after Kastus Kalinouski from the list of Belarusian state awards, follows the roadmap of the ideological shaping of official Belarusianness, which relies on commonness with Russia and separateness from Europe in the past.

33 "Vechno zhivi i rascvetai, Belarus'!" July 3, 2005,

<http://www.president.gov.by/press13718.html#doc>.

34 V. A. Melnik, *Gosudarstvennaia ideologia Respubliki Belarus': kontseptualnyie osnovy* (Minsk: Tesei, 2004), 147.

35 The leader of the 1863–64 rebellion against the czarist rule. Also recognized as a Polish and Lithuanian national hero.

36 During the Polish–Lithuanian January Uprising of 1863, Murav'iov was appointed Governor General of the Northwestern Krai (now Belarus, Lithuania). He promptly subdued the rebellion, burning or resettling all Belarusian, Polish and Lithuanian villages to Siberia. About 9,000 people were resettled, 127 hung. Konstanty (a.k.a. Kastus) Kalinouski was executed on his order.

37 A. Feduta, "Kollektivnyi politinformator i agitator. Izbrannye mesta iz uchebnikov po gosudarstvennoi ideologii Respubliki Belarus'," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 3, no. 47, (2006), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2006/47/fe14.html>.

All Belarusian history is the subject of a certain politically determined interpretation within the official historical narration, though the basic source of the Belarusian tradition is considered to be the Soviet era. “[W]e were a part of the great, large state, and all ideology was within that state [...] That ideology was in fact our Belarusian ideology too.”³⁸

This formulation, in spite of the obvious conflict of meaning between the notions of “Soviet” and “Belarusian,” is in its own way a sensible one. As the Belarusian political scientist Victor Chernov writes, “Sovietness” was for Belarusians an organic form of expression of their “ethnomarginality,” moreover, it was a way of their identification with the “the Great Country of Soviets.” One can say that due to such identification an original, Soviet–Belarusian “nationalism” was stimulated—a truly Soviet Belarusian felt, that he or she was the “most Soviet of the Soviet.”³⁹ The Belarusian nation is viewed as a product of Sovietness: “today’s Belarus has grown up not out of the ideas of nationalists-in-exile, but out of the truly brotherly family of the Soviet Republics, due to the common efforts of all the peoples, and, first of all, of the Russian one.”⁴⁰

Ideologists of the official Belgiarianness constantly emphasize the relevance and the positive nature of the Soviet experience, “succession” (implying the preservation of Soviet traditions through various practices of the state and public life) is proclaimed to be one of the principles of the state policy. “The state policy is to adhere to the established mechanisms and traditions, to improve some aspects of the policy that had taken place before, in order to improve its efficiency and progression.”⁴¹

In the official interpretation, all Belarusian tradition is focused on Soviet time, and Belarusian history is focused on World War II. Lapténok, the author of the texts on the president’s Web page, writes that “in those difficult years Belarusians struggled not only for the common victory, but also for the sovereignty of their country.”⁴²

It is not clear which country—Belarus or the Soviet Union—stands behind this concept of “their country;” however, this ambiguity does not contradict the construction of an identity that merges Belgiarianness with

38 Lukashenka, “Doklad na seminare rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov po ideologicheskoi rabote.”

39 Viktor Chernov, “Nishcheta ideologii ili ideologii nishchety,” *Filamaty* 3, no. 6 (2003): 47.

40 A. Rubinau, “Eshche raz ob ideologii,” *Sovetskaia Belorussia*, July 28, 2006.

41 “Glavnye printsipy gosudarstvennoi politiki Respubliki Belarus’,”

<http://www.president.gov.by/press10897.html#doc>.

42 Lapténok, “Belarus’— voiennyi i nraivstvennyi forpost.”

Sovietness. The people's memory focused on the Great Patriotic War undergoes a similar reduction. "The state policy is based on its commitment to the historical memory of the people—the victory in the Great Patriotic War. The introduction of the course 'the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people' in the curricula of the educational institutions has been a reflection of this commitment."⁴³

There is a discrepancy in the basic guidelines of the Belarusian ideology. Victor Chernov describes it as "an eclectic set of separate elements of Marxism and Keynesianism, the market and feudal socialism, liberalism and conservatism, pan-Slavism and nationalism, atheism and Orthodoxy."⁴⁴ However, as another Belarusian author Ianov Poleskii remarked, the Belarusian ideology is "a project that has failed in its theoretical part, but which has been a success in its practice."⁴⁵

The practice of state ideology like the Belarusian one means its successful internalization by people. When studies of patterns of Belarusians' self-perception show that the prevailing majority of Belarusians support integration with Russia on the grounds that Russians and Belarusians are historically one people, that they are spiritually close, and have similar languages, cultures, and traditions,⁴⁶ it indicates that the way most Belarusians perceive their Belarusianness reflects certain guidelines of the official discourse.

43 "Istoriko-kulturnyi potentsial Belarusi,"

<http://www.president.gov.by/press10640.html#doc>.

44 Chernov, "Nishcheta ideologii ili ideologii nishchety," 30.

45 Ianov Poleskii, "17 Thesis," *Nashe Mnienie*, March 14, 2005, <http://www.nmnby.org/pub/140305/seven.html>.

46 Clelia Rontoyanni, "Belarus and the East," 134.

Two Approaches to the Politics of Identity

The question of the mechanism of internalization of national ideas in constructing people's self-perception does not have a simple and single answer. Certainly, the language of political declarations, even if it is backed by the corresponding historical narratives, is insufficient for a formation of the national identity space. Following the path of distinguishing two different approaches to defining the "nation"—as a constructed entity or as a cultural whole—one can presume that these are also the ways to two strategies of identity formation. In the first case one can speak about the social reification strategy, which combines efforts of the educational system, press, and various civil rituals and social practices intended to establish close correlation between the state and the people via the "nation" as a concept of belonging. In the second case one can speak about the wide area of public and cultural representations through which the memories and myths from the past acquire "symbolical flesh and blood," becoming a part of the mass consciousness, penetrating into the space of self-images and self-representations. As P. Bourdieu writes, "The fact that struggles over identity [...] concern the imposition of perceptions and categories of perception helps to explain the decisive place which, like the strategy of the manifesto in artistic movements, the dialectic of manifestation or demonstration holds in all regionalists or nationalist movements."¹ As a matter of fact, both of these strategies imply the identity notion understood as a process, widely represented in theories of identity. "Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, a representation."² Indeed, representations and manifestations of identity do not simply transmit patterns and ideas of self-perception, but rather constitute the process of identity's symbolic reification.

1 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 224.

2 S. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222.

Identity is understood here as a phenomenon that manifests itself in the collective and individual consciousness and actions. It is seen here as a “situationalist” phenomena, as a constantly changing construct produced by the interaction of a number of discourses and social practices. This approach can be described as “soft” in the sense defined by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper.³ These authors understood identity not only as a category of analysis but also as a category of practice, by which they mean “categories of everyday social experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors.”⁴ As a category of practice it is “used by ‘lay’ actors in some everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others. It is also used by political entrepreneurs to persuade people to understand themselves, their interests, and their predicaments in a certain way, to persuade certain people that they are (for certain purposes) ‘identical’ with one another, at the same time, being different from others, and to organize and justify collective action along certain lines. In these ways the term ‘identity’ is implicated both in everyday life and in ‘identity politics’ in its various forms.”⁵

To understand how the two concepts of Belarusianness as the basis for the national self-determination interact with the public consciousness, a comparison of the techniques that guarantee their participation in the practices of the identity formation is required. In fact one can state that how the project of social and cultural reification of a certain type of Belarusianness is realized largely determines the course of events in the country.

The strategies of actualization of the alternative and the official Belarusianness are based on different principles of identity formation. The official Belarusianness is reified by numerous social practices on the micro- and the macro-levels of everyday life, in which the state is involved directly and indirectly. The alternative Belarusianness is represented by profound historical and political narratives supported by a number of cultural manifestations. These cultural manifestations provide an access of definite ideas to the public; that is, to those who are expected to become carriers of articulated and represented ideas. In this context, an analysis of cultural representations of the concepts of Belarusianness is actually an analysis of those cultural happenings and events that put definite ideas of the Belarusian nation, in its present and historical dimensions into the reality

3 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1–8.

4 Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” 5.

5 Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” 5–6.

of the cultural practice. These cultural manifestations create the sphere of objectification, in which certain ideas and values are exposed to the public and can be experienced by an individual. In this perspective of the cultural project of the Belarusian nation the proponents of alternative Belarusianness criticize the Western strategy of support for Belarusian democracy. Bulgakau considers the Western way of political engineering “fatal” in relation to Belarus. “Instead of building the Belarusian nation, concentrating on the support of cultural projects, it was decided to organize a network of recourse centers throughout the country, with whose assistance, in the opinion of their founders, the public would be able to overcome the dictatorship in a short period of time.”⁶

However, in Belarusian reality the influence of cultural manifestations of the alternative Belarusianness on Belarusians is limited by the oppositional policy and those cultural spheres where adherents of the alternative discourse of Belarusianness work. They have various instruments of public manifestation at their disposal. These are the independent press, the alternative cinema, music, Belarusian literature, youth clubs, and other spheres of subculture. All these kinds of cultural activity win over a certain number of people to the alternative Belarusianness. Their main “technical” deficiencies, however, are a disconnected event-trigger character and an irregular (sometimes, hardly any) access to the official public space.

Several examples of public and cultural manifestations of the alternative

Belarusianness have been chosen and are described below. These examples differ in scale and means of realization as well as in forms of existence in the cultural and public space. They are practically unrelated cultural projects or initiatives, each aimed at its own audience. Some of these cultural initiatives are openly engaged in political confrontation, others are outwardly neutral with respect to politics. The one thing that unites them is the availability of a definite ideology of Belarusianness, which does not agree with the official version of the national idea.

6 Valer Bulgakau, *Gistoria belaruskaga natsiianalizmu* (Vilnius: Instytut Belarusistyki, 2006), 315–16.

Belaruski Globus: *An Encyclopedia of What Existed before Communism*

If one puts “Sovietness” outside the Belarusian cultural landscape, it can be regarded as a sign of alternative Belarusianness. One such example is *Belaruski Globus* (The Belarusian Globe), a Web-based cultural project by the amateur photographer Andrei Dybovski. It is a collection of information about architectural and other places of interest in Belarus with 8,300 entries and 34,000 photographs,¹ which are being constantly updated.

Dybovski’s idea was to create a kind of alternative map of Belarus, to display all the places of historical memory of pre-Soviet Belarus, and to create a cultural landscape that exists outside the Soviet history of the Belarusian people. Conceived by a single person, the “Belarusian Globe” project has attracted people united by a common interest for Belarusian history without communism. Whatever had been made in the Soviet period is just ignored here as clearly external, brought about by an epoch of “alien” history. The main idea is “to take pictures of anything built before communism, that is 1939 and earlier for western Belarus and 1918 for eastern Belarus.”²

The project was aimed to show, on the one hand, that despite the widespread opinion about the lack of historical sites in Belarus, there exists a multitude of pre-1917 castles, religious edifices, and country estates. On the other hand, the collection of photographs illustrates their contemporary condition, revealing Belarusian society’s indifferent and uninterested attitude towards history.

The information in this collection is organized chronologically, geographically, and according to monument type. Chronologically the author singles out sites dating from before 1499, 1500–1599, and 1600–1699. Separately presented are objects related to the 1863–64 Kastus Kalinowski uprising, the Patriotic War of 1812, and World War I. It is also planned to create a separate collection of information about sites related to the Kosciuszko and the 1830 uprisings.

1 According to October 2008 data.

2 www.globus.tut.by. The Web site gets 500–600 visitors daily.

The monuments include fortifications (castles, fortresses, towers, living fortresses); churches (including Orthodox, Catholic, Old Believers, Greek Catholic, Calvinist, Protestant churches, as well as mosques and synagogues); palaces and mansions; monasteries and convents. Other structures discussed include wooden architecture, gates, steeples, town halls, towers, bridges, pharmacies, stations, mail-staging posts, ferries, mills, and so on. In order to collect this mass of materials, Dybovski traveled across Belarus for five years, for a total of 182 trips.

The idea of this project has a special resonance in the Belarusian context. Belarus is known to be a territory that has endured numerous wars and periodical changes of cultural and political domination which have erased most signs of history. Historical monuments have become rare, as with each power change the cultural landscape was also changed. Moreover, the Soviets were indifferent to the monuments of the pre-Soviet past and during the post-war years many parts of old towns, including Minsk, were demolished and rebuilt in the Soviet fashion. All this provides a special perspective for Dybovski's endeavor to carefully collect the remaining signs of the pre-Soviet Belarusian past. Throughout his collection one can discern the image of Belarus as described by alternative historians.

The Belarusian National Film
Misterium Occupation: Distancing themselves
from Soviets and Russians

World War II occupies a central position in the Soviet conceptualization of Belarusianness. The war, or more precisely, its image and the way of thinking about it has also become a catalyst for general attitude to history. The Belarusian writer Vasil Bykau (1924–2003), whose novellas are translated into more than one hundred languages, often focused his writing on the war experience, concentrating on the human and moral aspects of war horrors. This led him to the conflict with the authorities in the pre-perestroika years. The image of the war where real people participated with their tears and problems, feelings and imperfections made an unfavorable background for ideologized Soviet clichés.¹

The film discussed in this chapter not only digresses from the accepted official image of the war with the human perspective of war experience; it presents a new war participant—Belarusians as a separate people. *Misterium Occupation* (2003, dir. Andrei Kudinenko)² became a significant precedent of the cultural manifestation of alternative Belarusianness in the language of cinema. Both the content of the film—reinterpretation of World War II—and its public fortune in Belarus are representational for the alternative Belarusianness' fate. Cinema is an effective factor of contemporary mythology, including the national one. *Misterium Occupation* was planned as a national myth by its creators, and to some extent their idea was realized: the film was talked about as the “first national film.” It is no accident that the main characters are not specific figures, but a kind of archetypes: the mother, the father, Adam, Eve.

The film begins with a dialogue between two Belarusian *polizists* (Nazi collaborators). One of them admits that he wants to learn how to make films when the war is over. “What films? German ones? Maybe Soviet films?” his colleague asks. “No, ours. Belarusian films!” “But there is no Belarusian

1 With the advent of perestroika Bykau actively supported the Belarusian national revival and had to emigrate during Lukashenka's rule.

2 <http://www.partisanfilm.narod.ru>.

cinema. And never will be.” *Misterium Occupation*, in which this conversation takes place, is a response-manifestation to this remark: it is Belarusian national cinema, it does exist.

A brief history of Belarus is presented in the film’s initial sequence. “Five hundred years ago they did not know they were Belarusians, but they had the largest state in Europe. By the time they realized it, Belarusians had no state and were considered either half-Russians or defective Poles. But they still existed. Finally, they got lumped in with the Soviet People. Then the war and the occupation came and after that there turned out to be only a few of them left. Now Belarusians do have a state but they have discovered that they no longer exist.”³

This historical reference about the Belarusians’ fate sets up a context for the events taking place on screen. It should be noted that the picture of the military occupation shown in the film greatly deviates from the canons accepted during the Soviet time (and later in the official discourse of Belarusianness). For example, the film presents an unheroic image of partisans: they betray, falsify, rob peasants, and kill their mates. There is also a paradoxical patriotism of *polizists*. Yet, the main difference between the film and the accepted war doctrine is that Belarusians in the film have their own independent status, separate from the Soviets.

There were two sides in the Soviet perspective of the war: the fascists and the Soviet people. However, histories of Belarus written outside the Soviet Union paradigm testify to a “third way.” Vakar referred to the memories of local people: “People of military age, deprived of the chance to live and work in peace felt lost and betrayed. They were anti-Stalinist, and wanted to join those who were fighting against him. They enrolled in the anti-guerilla units but, realizing that they had to fight for the Germans and against their own people, deserted and joined the anti-German guerillas. Because most guerillas did not fight for people either, our men would desert again. [...] Thus many young people changed sides several times.”⁴

Misterium Occupation shows Belarusians as an independent, though a suffering actor, along with the German invaders and Soviet partisans. The atrocities of German soldiers toward Belarusians were opposed by the violence of the “forest brothers” against local villagers. Both are portrayed as invaders, who conquered the Belarusians’ lands.

3 The Belarusian state—the largest in Europe—refers to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. “Only few of them left” refers to the genuine “conscious” Belarusians as opposed to the Soviet ones.

4 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 195–96.

The film starts with footage of occupied Belarus from the state cinematographic and photo archives. The pictures show people of western Belarus where the Soviet power, established in 1939, was seen by many as an “occupation.” Accordingly, the arrival of German troops was considered by them as “liberation.” This is the time when the fascists had not yet begun burning down Belarusian villages together with the inhabitants. “For the people who for a quarter of a century had suffered from the confusion and distraction of alternate moments of illusion and despair, the German–Soviet war was nothing but a continuation of the civil war. The new occupants were received just as so many others had been in the past. Not as Germans, but as human beings bringing a promise of change.”⁵

The film consists of three parts, which become topically united at the end when the interrelation between the characters and events in which they participate becomes obvious. The first part, “Adam and Eve,” depicts the story of a partisan (Russian) who comes for a young man in order to take him to his detachment. It should be noted that there is a clear unobtrusive difference between nationalities in the film—Russian, Belarusian, Muslim (partisan commander Rustam). The difference becomes apparent in their speech—Belarusians speak either Belarusian or Russian with a strong Belarusian accent. Moreover, there is a scene in which the conflict between partisans takes place based on their cultural difference: after the commander Rustam, without hesitating, kills a Belarusian woman simply because she happened to be there, he himself is killed by his Belarusian companion, who disliked such aggression of an “alien” to “our woman.”

Thus, instead of a homogeneous Soviet community, common for Soviet films, we see people different in their culture and mentality. The young Belarusian Adam and the seasoned partisan Sergey Nikolayevich set off through forests and fields. On their way to the detachment place they visit a former partisan, who had left the detachment without permission and settled down on a farm hidden in the forests with a Polish woman Eve. As a “test” Adam must shoot the former partisan for treason. On the way back Adam speaks about the dreams and plans he had had in his childhood, which were ruined with the change of power: “As a kid I thought I would go to America, earn money, come back, buy some land and get married. But then the Soviets came.” Finally, he becomes a traitor himself before reaching the destination of their trip by killing his commander.

The second part is titled “Mother.” A child of a deaf-and-dumb Belarusian peasant woman plays in the forest and is run over by a German

5 Vakar, *Belorussia*, 173.

motorcycle. Having buried the child she nurses to health a wounded German soldier. The Belarusian *polizists* find the German and decide to shoot him. In the forest, pursuing a German, one of the *polizists* meets a partisan—they are fellow-villagers and know each other from childhood, they had been friends once, but now they are on opposite sides in the war. “We are neighbors,” they tell each other, and one of them kills the other. The motif of former friends, neighbors, fellow-villagers, and now enemies is recurrent throughout the film. It shows Belarusians as a people between a rock and a hard place dying for the interests of others.

The last part is titled “Father.” A village boy, whose mother lives with a *polizist* is pestered by other boys who call him “fascist.” He has no father and his mother makes him call her live-in partner “dad.” Secretly from his mother he meets with a partisan who pretends to be the boy’s father. With the help of the boy he wants to get into the house and execute the *polizist*. Partisans kill both the policeman and the boy’s mother and the fictitious father has to take the child with him.

At the symbolic level, namely the deidentification of Belarusians with the Soviet people is one of the main events of the film. It shows Belarusian history on the whole, different from the Soviet canons. During the conversation between the two partisans the Belarusian tells his Russian companion-in-arms that he is partisan in the fourth generation, his grandfather had fought against the Moskovites. This historic projection illustrates the past of Belarusians, separate from and opposed to Russia’s history.

As the film critic M. Zhabankov writes, “*Misterium Occupation* is a diagnosis of us and our relations, including those with our own history.”⁶ The film diagnoses a catastrophic lack of distance in relation to events and social systems that were primarily external for Belarus. Belarus as an independent unit was crushed by two totalitarian regimes having come together on Belarusian lands for the war, which became a fratricidal one for the Belarusian people. And if Germans left relatively shortly after they occupied the Belarusian lands, the Soviets stayed much longer and even in today’s independent Belarus the Sovietness keeps its position in Belarusians’ minds.

The emergence of such a film as *Misterium Occupation* proves that “there is no more occupation of the Belarusian soul,” as the film critic Andrei Rasinski wrote in his review. The film signals a beginning of a new story created out of the Belarusian past, in which Belarusians exist. It also signals

6 M. Zhabankov, “Mif protiv mifa, ‘Anastasia Slutskaia’ i ‘Okkupatsia Misterii’: dva podkhoda k natsionalnoi idee v belorusskom kino,” *Nashe Mnenie*, February 23, 2004, <http://nmnby.org/articles/230204/myth.html>.

a beginning of a new era in the alternative Belarusianness actualization in the Belarusian cultural space. However, in the context of the Occupation's fate in official Belarus this statement seems to be overly optimistic. The film was negatively received, the censorship banned it "for the distortion of the genuine truth about the partisan movement, insulting for the veterans, and bad for the young generation." In Belarus the film was released on DVD in the "Another Cinema" series, and has remained in the "underground" of Belarusian culture. At the same time, the film was invited to many film festivals, where it was received as the "first Belarusian national cinema." This strange paradox has a simple explanation: the manifestation of the alternative Belarusianness was not admitted into the official cultural space because of its too obvious conflict with the underlying ideas of the official Belarusianness. The public "fate" of the film is symptomatic: it demonstrates that the identity forming potential of the alternative Belarusianness has a chance to be realized only if the cultural space is open for its cultural manifestations and the state adopts the program of its symbolic reification.⁷

7 The ban on the film was lifted in February 2010. The premiere of the film in Belarus took place on 15th of February 2010 in the Pioneer cinema in Minsk.

The “Free Theater” or the Alternative Belarusianness on Stage

Another example of the alternative Belarusianness’ actualization is *Svobodnyi Teatr* (the Free Theater).¹ It was conceived as an alternative drama troupe to the official Belarusian theatrical establishment. The main reason of such opposition was the aspiration to stage new plays dealing with topical issues of contemporary Belarusian life, which Belarus’s state theaters refuse to do. The Free Theater was founded in March 2005 when the playwright Nikolai Khalezin, together with Natalia Koliada, launched a playwright competition. It has attracted 231 plays by 123 writers from nine countries, including 30 Belarusian playwrights. The main award was given to the Russian dramatist Viacheslav Durnenkov; however, the most important achievement of the competition was the discovery of a new generation of young Belarusian playwrights. Since then, one of the spheres of the Free Theater activity is a series of master classes for local playwrights led by distinguished professionals from abroad (playwrights, directors, critics). Workshops and performances usually take place in private apartments, bars, cafes, and clubs, often outside the city, because none of the official institutions want to take the risk of hosting them. Tom Stoppard² described his exotic experience of a master class for playwrights after he returned to the United Kingdom. “My seminar was bussed an hour into the countryside to a repro ‘traditional village.’ So, in a setting of an old-world farm buildings, a working smithy, a pottery and a museumful of costumes and artefacts, we sat down to talk about making theatre.”³

The group premiered with *4.48 Psychosis*, a play by British playwright Sarah Kane that deals with depression and suicide. Their next performance was *We. Self-Identification*, seen as one of the most politically-charged plays staged at the theater. The theater announced a competition inviting mini-plays that reflect Belarusians’ cultural self-awareness. Several plays were combined for a final version that was directed by Vladimir Shcherban: the

1 www.dramaturg.org.

2 A British playwright and human rights activist.

3 Tom Stoppard, “Accidental Tyranny,” *The Guardian*, October 1, 2005, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1581238,00.html>.



Scene from *We*.
Self-Identification.
 Source: www.dramaturg.org

parabolic play *A Friend or a Sister for a Dead Man* by Konstantin Steshik, a psychedelic monologue by Pavel Priazhko *Motherland N²*, and a dark comedy *Matter of Principle* by Pavel Rossolko. The idea of the whole project was best represented in *Karty i byrlo w dva stvola*⁴ by Pavel Rossolko written using the verbatim technique.⁵ It is based on trivial conversations recorded by the author on the construction site of the National Library in Minsk—a construction project supervised by the Belarusian government. Its construction was declared to be a national “grand-project” and, when built, became a national achievement, a symbolic representation of the Belarusian “success story.” One of the authors spent several months working as a construction worker with a dictaphone in his uniform pocket. For

4 *Karty i byrlo v dva stvola* references Guy Ritchie’s movie, *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels*.

5 “Verbatim theater” is a phrase used to describe a type of play written using only the precise words spoken by people interviewed about a particular event or topic. The playwright interviews people that are connected to the topic that the play is focused on and uses their testimony to construct the piece. This is used to achieve a degree of authority akin to that represented by the news.

Poster *We. Self-Identification*.Source: www.dramaturg.org

the play the author put together real dialogues of construction workers, who drink, philosophize, and swear; they did not talk about politics, but their attitude toward the work they were doing, with all its cynicism and indifference, became highly political in this context. Director Vladimir Shcherban, commented on the harsh style of the performance: “Everyone wants the fair talk. Even if it is artistic overshoot, but it will have no conventionality. Today, when people have the Internet at their disposal, there is no need to speak in allegories.”

The conditions under which the performances of *We. Self-Identification* take place impose some limitations on them. As Andrei Kureichik writes, each performance acquires specific features of “apartment stage-directing,” which takes into account the small space, closeness to the spectators (so the speeches are addressed directly to the audience), and does not allow any complicated stage settings.⁶ Scenography in the performance is nearly absent. Everyday noises and songs replace the musical background. The four

6 A. Kureichik, “Pro nas,” *Belgazeta*, October 31, 2005, <http://www.belgazeta.by/20051031.43/460212001>.



Scene from *Jeans Generation*. Source: www.dramaturg.org

actors dressed in black dungarees and orange safety helmets perform in all parts of the play. The performance displays how the working class, the low-down of the Belarusian people comes through at the work places, in family life, and in philosophic reasoning. It shows the “other side” of the national grand project, and the attitude real Belarusians have toward it.

In the final scene the actors recite texts about slavery by Socrates and Aleksei Losev, a prominent Russian philosopher who was sent to labor camps for rejecting Marxism. In an interview with Radio Free Europe Khalezin describes the play as a “contemporary vision of slavery.” One passage from the play reads: “In a sense, the slave looking after his master is freer than the latter, because he has the option of running away from him. The master, however, cannot hide from himself.”⁷

By 2007 the Free Theater has had seven plays in its repertoire. The third premiere was the performance *The Technique of Breathing in the Vacuum*, by a Russian playwright Natalya Moshina, which tells the story of a girl with cancer. Then there was a one-man production *The Jeans Generation* by Khalezin. It is a two-hour monologue about childhood in the 1970s and the blue trousers, which are very uncomfortable to wear while one is in prison.

7 Claire Bigg, “Belarus: Underground Troupe Brings Cutting-Edge Theater to Moscow,” *RFE/RL*, February 3, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/02/73133c5e-9854-44c8-a0ff-38a2b758d9a7.html>.

"Jeans" acquired a particular meaning when following the "rose" and "orange" revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine the Belarussian revolution to be was called a "blue jeans" one. The main topic of this play is freedom in all possible meanings. The play starts with the main character sharing his memories about the Soviet times, when jeans could only be bought illegally, but those who wanted them could find a way and buy the desirable pair. The first part of the performance reminds the viewers of a nostalgic anecdote, funny and touching at the same time. But then the actor moves on to different stories of present-day Belarus, about his arrests, and how one can be taken into custody for an innocent attempt to disagree with the government. It is about his real experience of being arrested and judged without a defense attorney, and detainment in an overcrowded prison cell. At the end of the performance everyone gets a little piece of jeans as a symbol of freedom.

Another performances—*Being Harold Pinter*—was based on a play by Harold Pinter and his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. It is a ninety-minute show in which seven young actors display a gradual destruction of a human personality. It shows that a simple lack of mutual understanding within a family is not far from cruelty in a couple's relationship, and physical humiliation of an individual is not far from humiliation of a whole people. At one point during the performance the actors appear to be trapped inside a polythene sheet as if gasping for the oxygen of freedom. As a final masterstroke, the group incorporates transcripts from Belarussian political prisoners that are almost indivisible from the dramatized scenes. A combination of Harold Pinter's ideas with the reality of present-day Belarus makes a way from today's Belarus to Europe.

The Free Theater has received a lot of international support. Among its patrons are Václav Havel, the renowned playwright and former Czech president, and Tom Stoppard, an acclaimed British playwright. The Nobel Prize winner British author Harold Pinter transferred the copyright for all his plays to the theater. The Free Theater participated in festivals in many countries—France, Germany, the United States, Great Britain, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia. It has performed on the stage of the Swedish Royal Theater, at Meno Fortas theater in Vilnius, and at Moscow's Meyerhold Center, one of Russia's most progressive theaters. In Belarus, the performances have taken place not only in Minsk but also in several smaller towns like Borisov and Mogilev. "To attend our performances, you need to find out a special phone number, call it, someone will write down your name, then you need to go to a place far from the city center, where you will be identified," Khalezin describes the way to get to a performance. Despite

such obstacles, between 2005 and 2007 more than 100 performances were given, visited by about 5,000 people.

When the cofounder and playwright Khalezin says “we do not declare any political idea. The only thing we declare is freedom in art and the morality of those involved in the theater” he is both right and not. On the one hand, the Free Theater indeed does not proclaim any political issue as the main topic of its performances. On the other hand, the alternative approach to the Belarusian contemporary life and to the Belarusian identity in particular—such as in *We. Self-identification*—proves to be one of the most politicized subjects in today’s Belarus.

Pavel Priazhko, the author of two plays staged by the Free Theater, explains the reason why his plays are accepted only by this theater: “Those who head state theaters still live in the Soviet Union, but I want to live in Europe, in a free country.”⁸ And he does not mean by this “moving from Belarus to Europe,” but rather, transforming Belarus into a European country. Performances of the Free Theater are reflections of the current Belarusian situation from the standpoint of a European Belarus to be. They install “European Belarus” into the context of the existing reality, paradoxically, by showing its dark sides—political prisoners, human rights violation, people’s unawareness of the problems, and political apathy. However, as one of the theater’s spectators, after the performance *Being Harold Pinter* noted, “the main paradox of the situation is that this kind of effervescent performances is addressed and presented to the auditorium that is already on ‘this side of barricades’ and has no need to be agitated and persuaded. As a result, the show turns out into a kind of psychological abreaction for people deprived of other ways of self-determination.” And this in fact is not only a paradox of the Free Theater activity but also the major problem of the alternative Belarusianness’ manifestation in general. The status of an underground theater and its performances located on the territory of a parallel Belarusian culture prevents their influence on Belarussians’ self-perception on a wider scale.

8 Anton Kashlikov, “Trusy po vsei kvartire,” *Belgazeta*, December 4, 2006, <http://www.belgazeta.by/20061204.48/360495181>

Independent Rock Music: Critical Reflection and Protest

Another sphere conducive to an alternative Belarusianness that has access to public manifestation is Belarusian rock music. A number of Belarusian groups, many of which perform in Belarusian, have become symbols of Belarusian political nonconformism (Krama, Neuro Dubel, N.R.M., Palac, Novaye Neba [New Heaven], and many others). Their music, unlike the cinema and theater described in the preceding chapters or even the tournaments of medieval knight clubs to be described in the next chapter, has an entirely different formula of interaction with the audience. Their CDs become part of everyday life for young Belarusians. Hit parades, concerts, annual festivals, rock award ceremonies (e.g., the Rock Crown) have made Belarusian rock music an influential instrument of manifestation of alternative Belarusianness. Thus, the Basowiszczka festival, Belarus's largest annual youth-music festival, has been held in Poland for seventeen years; the independent annual rock festival "Rock-Kola" has been held annually for seventeen years in Polatsk (in 2007 the local authorities declared that the following year's festival would not be permitted in this city, and organizers plan to move the festival abroad). The annual Belarusian rock award "Rock Crown" ceremony was resurrected in 2005. Alternative Belarusian youth music is represented by a wide range of trends from heavy rock music and rap to ethno, folk, folk-rock, folk-modern, and ancient music. Besides solo albums, collective CDs are regularly released in Belarus, which consolidate Belarusian rock music on the basis of a common idea of free Belarus—an alternative to the existing Belarusian state. While these collections often combine compositions of different styles and genres, they are united in their freedom-loving aspirations. An example of such a collection is *People's Album* (Narodny Albom) (First released in 1997, and presented as an annual concert under the same title since then), *Christmas Album* (Kaliadny albom), *A Saint Night-2000* (Swiataia Noch-2000), *I Was Born Here* (Ja naradziusia tut) (2000, a collection of Belarusian songs, marches or anthems of Belarus at various times, is combined with patriotic compositions of contemporary musicians). A concert held in 2000 for the first time in Minsk, with the same title as the latter CD "*I Was Born Here*," became the first



Disk cover "Songs of Freedom"

action of the all-national mobilization election campaign, in which a multitude of public organizations of Belarus participated. "I Was Born Here" was a vivid example of politicization of the actual youth music space, which led to cooperation between musicians and the political opposition. Another, later example of similar interaction is the musical project "*Songs of Freedom*" (*Pesni Svabody*, Parts 1, 2, 3).¹

Some examples of popular lyrics of Belarusian alternative music provided below show the various forms political messages acquire in contemporary Belarusian music. They reveal the layer of critical reflection in the song lyrics concerning what goes on in the country.

Some Belarusian musicians express their civic position by referring to Belarusian history. Their performances of music of the Middle Ages (often in modern arrangements) is in fact a means of popularizing the Belarusian past (the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania [GDL]), as the musicians themselves often mention. The group *Stary Olsa* (The Old Olsa) is a kind of trendsetter in contemporary Middle Ages Belarusian music with a clear "historical" concept. In its creative activities the group is guided by the style of the Middle Ages and popularizes the epoch of the GDL as a special

1 Three CDs were released in 2006–2007: *Pesni Svabody*, VoliaMusic, 2006, *Pesni Svabody-2*, VoliaMusic, 2006, *Pesni Svabody-3 Ploshcha Kalinouskaga*, VoliaMusic 2007. Tuzin Hitou, (music portal dedicated to Belarusian music), <http://music.fromby.net/sliberty>.

period of Belarusian musical culture. At the same time, the content of many compositions is also connected with the topics of that time. For instance, in the song “*Litvin*,” the authors refer to the heroic past of Litvin—a historic Belarusian name in GDL times. Here they mention heroic deeds near Smolensk (in wars with the Moscow Principality) and Grunwald. In this case, musicians overcome the gap in historiography caused by insufficient emphasis on the Battle of Grunwald in heroization of the Belarusian past in the works of Belarusian alternative historians mentioned by P. Sadouski.² Litvin, the protagonist of the song is a warrior who had multiple victories, including in the Battle of Grunwald.

*Litvin was going along blue water,
Three days and three nights, with his sword covered in blood
Litvin was walking in Grunwald,
Three days and three nights, playing with his chain,
Litvin was riding near Smolensk
Three days and three nights, chopping with his saber
Litvin swore in the saint oak forest on his old sword
To fight foreigners.*³

The group *Testamentum Terrae* (Latin for “Testament of the Land”) attempts to fill in the sound gap in Belarusian cultural legacy. Because contemporary people have no chance to hear the original sound of ancient music, Testamentum Terrae took on the task of restoring the authentic sound of our ancestors’ music. They use a great number of instruments—traditional pipes and fiddles, as well as the lute, the shalmei, zhaleykas—all reproduced based on pictures of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. According to Y. Pankevich, the founder and leader of the group, the album *Slauny Panich* (Honest Young Gentlemen)⁴ “presents music of our land from the Middle Ages and later times. The heroic nature of our ancestors inspires us and all those who are fond of history.”⁵

A music critic wrote about the album *Piosenki samotnaga Litvina* (*Songs of Lonely Litvin*) of another group, P.L.A.N.⁶ that their disc “could

2 P. Sadouski, “Natsiianalnaia identychnasts’: patriatychnaia i pazytyvisckaia interpretatsii,” *Filamaty*, no. 1 (8) (2004), <http://kamunikat.fontel.net/www/czasopisy/filamaty/08/03.htm>

3 Song “Litvin,” (folk music, text: Z. Sasnouski folk stylized), Stary Olsa, CD “Shliakh,” BMA Group, 2004, <http://staryolsa.com/eng/texts.html>.

4 Album *Slauny Panich*, Testamentum Terrae, BMA Group, 2007.

5 *Tuzin Hitou*, December 11, 2007, <http://music.fromby.net/article/968>.

6 *Piosenki samotnaga Litvina*, P.L.A.N., BMA Group, 2006.

have been released at the beginning of the past century if a music industry had existed then.”⁷ The song titles and main themes refer to that time: “People, Find Yourself,” “My Land, I Love You,” and “This Land Is Given by the Lord.” On the one hand, the word “Litvin” as a definition of a Belarusian refers to people’s roots and traditions in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, the people’s problems here are similar to those that existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The lyrics contain a multitude of quotations and allusions to the poetry of Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas, Maksim Bagdanovich, Natalia Arsenneva. Some compositions are reworkings of folklore. Both the content and genre of this album restore the atmosphere of the first Belarusian revival, which today, a century later, sounds topical.

The main patriotic load of Belarusian youth culture is borne by overly political albums and compositions. The national-cultural and political orientation in Belarusian music has a tradition that started, according to some authors, back in 1986 at the first festival, titled *Try kolery* (Three Colors).⁸ As Anatol Myalgui, a music critic and alternative music activist writes in his account of the event, the festival arose from the impetus “to do something that would draw Belarusian culture from the village ‘bast shoes of folklore,’ habitually provided by the party bosses and local Russian-speaking intelligentsia at the time. We meant to persuade all those who had erased Belarusianness that it was alive in modern forms and had a historical perspective.”⁹ The repertoire speaks in favor of the original historical consciousness of Belarusian rock music. The hard-rock band *Magistrat* performed the song *Geroiam Grunvaldu* (“To the Heroes of Grunwald”). Considering that no official textbook of that period ever mentioned the participation of Belarusian warriors in this battle, the musicians presented an alternative to the entire paradigm of official history education. The official explanation of the festival name “Three Colors” was related to the participation of groups who performed three different styles of music: pop rock (the band *Minsk*), heavy metal (*Magistrat*), and new wave (*Bonda*). But at that time, the youth cultural movement *Talaka* was very active. Among its supporters were many amateurs of Belarusian-language rock music, and it was they who conceived the perception of the festival’s name based on the three colors—white-red-white—of the Belarusian national flag in 1991–95, which later became the main symbol of the Belarusian opposition.

7 Tuzin Hitou, “P.L.A.N.—Pesenki Samotnaga Litvina. Znich Nadzei,” May 24, 2006, <http://music.fromby.net/article/575>.

8 Try kolery-2 was organized in 1988.

9 Anatol Myalgui, “Festyvalu “Try kolery” – 20 god,” “*Tuzin Hitou*,” April, 26, 2006, <http://music.fromby.net/article/181>.

From the moment that the white-red-white flag became a symbol of the opposition, it launched a new stage in Belarusian rock music. In reply to the 1995 referendum, the group *Novaie Nieba* (New Heaven) released an album titled *Maia Kraina* (My Country), which music critic Siargei Budkin called “the most timely album in Belarusian rock music.”¹⁰ The song “*My Country*” from this album presents the image of Belarus as an alternative to the current Belarusian state ruled by A. Lukashenka. “My Country” is just a country where the common people live, but their distinction is that their country is “under a white banner with a red ribbon.”

*I love to see the shining sun
In the morning through the curtain
I like the smell of fresh coffee
The smell of fried potatoes
I like the smoke of a cigarette
I like the smell of perfume
I like cold blues
I like my old jeans
I live in this country [...]
My country is under a white banner
Under a white banner with a red ribbon.
My freedom¹¹*

The phrases “my country [...] under a white banner with a red ribbon [...] my freedom” sounded as an appeal to recognize what had happened in the country after the state symbols changed. The problem that musicians were singing about and opposition politicians were talking about was more profound and serious—in the first referendum the Belarusian president initially demonstrated his style of government, manipulation of public opinion, and pressure on voters.

In addition to the song “*My Country*,” the band performed other compositions protesting against political developments in the country. One of the more sensational compositions, *Idi damou!* (Go Home!) is written in a very reserved mode, although it is undoubtedly opposed to the true face of the authorities, as revealed in the referendum. Those who trust the authori-

10 Siargei Budkin, “Novaie Nieba u sali slavy,” *Tuzin Hitou*, September 19, 2007, <http://music.fromby.net/article/833>.

11 “Maia Kraina,” (music; Novaie Neba, text; Liavon Volski), CD „Maia kriaina”, Novaie Neba, Kovcheg, 1996.

ties are equated with those who “look at the red sky and hope it will rain” or “those who look at the dry soil and hope the crops will grow.” The only hope for Belarus to return to normal life is to send home the person who has become president.

*You and I, we chose three words,
But “they” would not listen,
We chose three words,
President, go home [...]*¹²

Since recording “Go Home!” at the state teleradiostation in 1995, a number of former workers of Belarusian state radio, together with Kasia Kamockaia, vocalist and head of *Novaie Nieba*, have not been allowed on the premises. And the name *Novaie Nieba* has not been pronounced on radio and television since then.

During the past ten years, alternative national symbols have often been the focus of musicians’ attention. They have always served as a sign of acute political and cultural opposition. The first conceptual Belarusian hip-hop project was called *Chyrvonym pa belym* (“With Red Against White”).¹³ In 2006, the *Chyrvonym pa belym* released the album *Kryvavy Sakavik* (The Bloody March), which is devoted to the political protest against the falsification of the president election’s result in March of that same year. In the composition of the same name, is a refrain about a green and red March—the colors of the official Belarusian flag, which becomes a symbol of alienation, and makes Belarusians feel as if they are “guests” in this country:

*March is a green month
March is a red month
Like a flag on the map
We feel like guests at home*¹⁴

The alienation between Belarusianness as a true national idea and official Belarusianness is revealed differently in music. The band *Recha’s* (the Echo) song titled *Bats’kaushchyna* (Fatherland)¹⁵ is devoted to the topic of military occupation, which is reminiscent of old history. It is a song about partisanship during World War II—about treachery, revenge, suffering, and

12 “*Idzi damou*” (text and music: Novaie Neba), CD *Go Home*, Kovcheg, 1995.

13 CD *Kryvavy Sakavik* (text and music: Chyrvonym pa belym), LP, AmbasadaMG ns, 2007.

14 “*Kryvavy Sakavik*”, *Chyrvonym pa belym* 2006–2007, Ambasada Music Group, 2007.

15 *Bats’kaushchyna* (text: Takidang, music: Recha), Recha, in Album *Pesni Svabody-3*, Volia-Music 2007.



Krou, the rapper behind “With Red Against White,” at a concert (2006). *Source:* music.fromby.net.

dancing to alien music (“You wait for us, don’t dance to their music”). But the context implies that the military occupation is perceived just as an allegory. The musicians admit it themselves when they say they “were forced to choose the topic of war by the current state of Belarusian society, where everybody dances to alien songs.”¹⁶ That is why the main sense of the song lies in its analogy to modern life—today, too, the authorities are alien to the Belarusian people, they are not Belarusian.

The history of Belarusian rock music in public life is very closely connected with politics. Since the mid-1990s, most rock bands have gone to the extreme in accepting the position of political opposition. In July 2004, exactly ten years after Lukashenka was elected president, these groups took part in a concert held immediately after a political rally timed to coincide with the constitutional “end” of Lukashenka’s term in office—a term that would have ended, if Lukashenka had not called a 1996 referendum to alter his term’s starting date.

Since then, these rock bands have been blacklisted and their songs banned from radio; they have not been invited to appear on television, and their concerts have often been prohibited from taking place under various

16 *Tuzin Hitou*, “Rekha suprats’ stabilnastsy,” September, 8, 2006, <http://music.fromby.net/article/338>.

pretexts. At the same time, the groups frequently perform at political opposition meetings, of which their performances have become an integral part and play the role of informal support for the speeches of opposition politicians. Belarusian rock music has become not only a cultural underground phenomenon but also a sphere of political self-determination for those who perform it and listen to it.

Music was a fundamental element of the March protest in the square against the falsified results of the 2006 presidential elections. Comments about the disc *Pesni Svobody* (Songs of Freedom) include: "Musical spring 2006 will be specifically remembered on this disc—in a simple envelope, with rich content (twenty-three songs). The disc contains only hits and is devoted only to freedom."¹⁷

Another disc, *Pesni Svobody-2*, released in July 2006 was timed to the restoration of Independence Day in Belarus on August 27 (the day that the Declaration of Independence of Belarus was adopted in 1991, and later abolished by the Belarusian president). Still later, a third project, *Pesni Svobody-3 Ploshcha Kalinouskaga*, was released, devoted to the events of March 2006. The liner notes to the disc read: "*Songs of Freedom* is more than a typical musical project. It is a manifesto written using guitars and tambourines." The collection represents not only different styles and trends but also different generations. Many compositions depict the direct reaction of musicians to events in the square. The group *With Red Against White* recorded the track "*The Bloody March*." The poet Andrei Khadanovich wrote the song *To the Memory of Those on Kastus Kalinowski Square*. The leader of Bez Bileta, Vital Artist, dedicated his composition *Kalinowski Square* to the participants in Spring 2006, which is an instrumental work in the soundtrack genre and not specifically based on the rules of rock music. It sounds like a musical accompaniment to the events in the Minsk square with its tents.

The producers (Volia Music) chose a unique method for disseminating these discs—they filled the demand via free distribution. The free discs can be ordered by mail or through the Internet by download from the Web site www.za-svabodu.org. Here the musicians and producers relinquish their commercial interests in order to use music as a form of political and cultural protest, as an instrument of disseminating specific ideas.

Many Belarusian musicians express open confrontation to the authorities in their compositions. Events in the country cause them to respond

17 *Tuzin Hitou*, "Pesni Svobody-3. Pl. Kalinouskaga," June 18, 2007, <http://music.fromby.net/article/730>.

anew each time, and many works of Belarusian groups are replies to the words or actions of the regime. As a reaction to the description of participants in the March protest as a bunch of young rascals—as the protesters were called in the state-run media—the group N.R.M. sings the song “*Nas Dakhalery!*” (There Are Loads of Us!).

*We are blacklisted, we have been there long
You won't have enough paper to list us all
We are millions, There Are Loads of Us!*¹⁸

One can find numerous other examples of musical protest against the current Belarusian authorities. The group Znich in the song “*Belarus*” describes the country as “a bird, who aspires to freedom, so, let it live in freedom.”¹⁹ Chanting in the hard-rock style—“*Belarus' budzie volnai!*” (Belarus will be free!) by Tavarysh Mauzer together with Sveta Sugaka (this group also collaborates with the Free Theater).²⁰

In 2006 the composition *Mensk i Minsk* by N.R.M. was named Song of the Year, according to the opinion poll conducted on the Tuzin Hitou Web site. Referring to two versions of the Belarusian capital's name—Minsk as the officially accepted one and Mensk as a popular name among cultural and political oppositionists—the song depicts life in two different cities located on the same territory and in the same streets. “In our capital we live as if in two families [...] Mensk and Minsk are like two halves of the capital's soul.” In Minsk there are residential permits and a City Hall, an Ice Palace and concrete parking lots, streets with joyless Soviet names and equally joyless Soviet habits. Mensk is a town that lives not so much on the map as in the souls of true Belarusians and those who value history and the pre-Soviet past of their town.

*It is so nice to walk along in Mensk
With its cozy lights in small shops
With the spikes and towers of old churches
Old yards, and walls, and roofs [...]*²¹

18 Song “*Nas dakhalery!*” (text and music: N.R.M.) Album “06”, N.R.M., 2007.

19 Song „*Belarus*“ (text: Tabolich, music: Znich), Album “*Kryzhy-Abiaregi*,” BMA Group 2006.

20 *Belarus' budzie volnai* (text and music: Tavarysh Mauzer), Tavarysh Mauzer and Sveta Sugaka, CD „*Prem'ier Tuzin 2007*“, uzin Gitou, Vestrekords-plus, 2006.

21 Song *Mensk i Minsk* (text and music: N.R.M. and L. Volski), CD „*Prem'ier Tuzin 2007*“, uzin Gitou, Novaia muzychnaia kampania, 2007.

The opposition of two aspects of the Belarusian capital is an allegory for the patterns of life in Belarusian society. One aspect is connected with all of the rites and practices of socialization that everyone here acquires willingly or not. The other aspect is born out of a reflective and critical attitude to the present and leads to the search for an alternative version of Belarus as an idea and a country.

* * *

The Website Tuzin Hitou gives statistics citing 50,000 downloads of the first collection of *Songs of Freedom*. Taking into account that this figure represents only part of those who are actually familiar with this music (some have subscribed to free discs, others have downloaded the music from their friends), we can confidently state the “public” nature of this music makes it one of the most influential instruments of manifestation of opposition ideas in Belarusian society. The official ideologists are well aware of this, too. Autumn 2007 is known in Belarusian society as the time of the authorities’ decision to have a dialogue with the Belarusian opposition musicians. Alek Praliaskouski, head of the Ideology Department of the presidential administration, invited leaders of the most popular blacklisted Belarusian groups to his office for a discussion. He not only acknowledged that some musicians are prevented from performing but also proposed cooperation by offering them state help, access to TV and radio, and support for organizing a major concert “Rock for Belarus.” The musicians refused to sing under this politically charged motto (“For Belarus” is the slogan of all major pro-Lukashenka political campaigns).

The Belarusian independent rock-music audience was split in its opinion concerning the musicians’ meeting with the country’s main ideologist. Some saw the conversation as a good sign, others called the musicians traitors.²² An editorial in the newspaper *Nasha Niva* commented on this as a victory: “First of all, this move shows that the authorities failed to make Belarusian rock submit to their will. But if you fail to overpower someone, you can always try to buy him. This is the logic of official morality. In any case, today we celebrate the great victory of our music and our language. Let them sound and time will settle everything.”²³ Pit Pavlov, the leader of N.R.M., saw things this way, too. “It was not the musicians who gave way

22 Irina Khalip, “V situacii vybora nachodiatsia vse,” *Charter 97*, November 30, 2007, www.charter97.org/ru/news/2007/11/30/2011.

23 Barys Tumar, “Rock for Belarus?” *Nasha Niva Blog Nearby*, November 22, 2007, www.nn.by/index.php?c=ar&i=13196.

to the authorities, but the authorities who gave way to the musicians.”²⁴ Though, Kasia Kamotskaia called the meeting “a dialogue between a cat and a mouse.”²⁵

Regardless of the consequences, one can say that such an invitation to cooperate with the authorities was an attempt to legalize independent rock music in the official cultural space. While this meant recognition of its efficiency and power, at the same time, it was an attempt to neutralize rock music as a form of manifestation and instrument of consolidation of opposition Belarusianness.

24 *Naviny*, “Belorusskie rokery rasstavliali tochki na “I,” November 27, 2007, http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2007/11/23/ic_articles_116_154113.

25 Kasia Kamotskaia, “Eto dialog koshki s myshkoi,” *Charter 97*, November 22, 2007, www.charter97.org/ru/news/2007/11/22/1781.

Medieval Reenactors: A Manifestation of Belarus's European History

The situation is different in the case of another noteworthy example of actualization of alternative Belarusianness, the youth movement represented by medieval reenactors organized in “knight orders.” The beginning of this movement dates back to 1992–93, and from an informal association of some dozens of people it developed into a real youth movement by the end of the 1990s. Today, in Minsk alone, there are about fifty groups of reenactors. Nearly every Belarusian city and town has a reenactor group.

The basic idea of the movement is reflected in its name: “reenactment” is a reproduction and staging of Belarusian historical events, tournaments, and historic battles from the Belarusian past. For example, the festival titled “The White Castle”, organized by the group Dragon Heart (in 1999 renamed The North Temple Order) was a reenactment of the Nemiga battle in 1067, and “The Toll of Zaslavl” (2001) was the reenactment of a castle siege and a battle between the armies of prince Svidrigaylo and princes Andrew and Yuri of Zaslavl in 1434. The idea of the group Prince Court (based in Minsk and founded in 1999) reflects in fact the general ideology of the movement: “Our association is engaged in studying the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as well as in re-creating the ornaments, household utensils, and attire of that epoch and state.”¹

Interest in history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is connected here with an interest in visual and emotional actualization of the past. The reenactments are held in the neighborhood of surviving Belarusian castles, and, in some cases, the “knights” themselves repair and restore the castles. Thus, in organizing the festival “The Hoary legend” (2001) in Drutsk, part of the castle was restored from the ruins by the reenactors. The participants made costumes rendering as closely as possible the original clothing of the historical epochs. For instance, group members can participate only after examination by a special jury. The judgment system includes the following criteria:

1 See www.bel-knight.com.

- “the documentation of the costume”—in this case the artisan’s work is examined, for example, based on the fabric samples given in the description, a full list of sources, illustrations from the primary sources, and patterns;
- “the historical character of the image and defense of the costume”—the correspondence of the image to the stated period, class, and ethnicity, the full value and authenticity of the costume, and defense of the costume demonstrated by a participant on the stage are examined;
- “historical pattern of cutting”—the correspondence of the cutting to historical sources is examined.

In other words, the “historical basis” of both the costumes and the events that are reenacted at the festivals is accentuated. The participants are expected to demonstrate knowledge of the sources and even the “full value of the literature” used in preparation is examined. A permanent partner of the reenactment is the Internet resource of the project “The History of the GDL,” an academic group of researchers dealing with the period of the GDL. Interest in the history of the GDL and a desire to “become” people from that time and re-enact events of that epoch bring the alternative GDL history to life, transforming it into “our state” and “our past.” The repeated reclamation and actualization of knightly tradition serves as a reminder that in the old days the culture of European castles was on the boundary of Belarusian lands. Farther from Smolensk quite a different tradition started—the tradition of kremlins. Belarus was on the outskirts but nevertheless a part of Europe.

In 2000 several reenactor groups, “The Prince Court” (Kniazhy Guf; Minsk), “The Dainava” (Lida), “The Brest Banner” (Berastseiskaia harugv; Brest), and “The Iron Wolf” (Polotsk) founded the association of the “Knights of the Grand Duchy” in Belarus. The purpose of the association, as its charter states, was “an integration of military and historical reenactment groups of the GDL in the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries for joint activities at the national and international levels, an exchange of information and experience, and the organization of common events to enhance the prestige of the fatherland’s history.”² Although from the very beginning, the association declared its indifference to politics, the idea of revival of the Belarusian past of GDL times has apparent political implications in present-day Belarus. And though the groups are not allowed to take part in political actions and events, each festival of medieval culture and each

2 Ibid.

medieval reenactment is a symbolic manifestation and actualization of alternative Belarusian history and, through it, alternative Belarusianness in the public space of Belarus. With the return of medieval knightly culture in Belarus is the return of Belarus to the European tradition.

The groups hold annual medieval festivals and tournaments in different towns and organize concerts and exhibitions of armaments and household utensils of the GDL epoch. The first Belarusian reenactment was held in Minsk in 1995. Today about ten major festivals and about twenty reenactments are held in the country annually. Most large groups hold festivals of their own, many of which attain annual status. The festivals "Zaslavl Toll," "The Knights' Saga," "The White Castle," "The Castle of Navargrudak," "Ancient Nesvige," "Gedymin's Castle," "Medieval Belarus," and many others have already become new "knights" of Belarusian tradition.

In the extended festival geography and "mass" character of the events organized by the Belarusian reenactor groups, and in the idea of European Belarus that they manifest in their activity, one can see a form of spreading and propagation of the ideas of alternative Belarusianness. Nevertheless, "the public life" of the groups and their relations with official Belarusian culture is different from that of *Misterium Occupation* or the Free Theater.

In the mid-1990s the activity of the reenactment groups had the status of a peculiar subculture that was not banned and was accepted by the authorities neutrally. With the growth in demand for symbolic support of the official national idea these groups were invited into the official cultural space. The authorities not only gave permission to hold festivals and reenactments but sometimes participated in their organization. Thus, the reenactors' festival "The Hoary Legend" (2001) in the ancient town of Drutsk was organized with the help of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus. The organizers of the festival "Gedymin's Castle 2005" in Lida were the republican youth association "The Knights of the Grand Duchy" and the local authorities of Lida. Sometimes, the reenactors are invited to official celebrations and this seemingly makes them part of the official cultural strategy. The festivals "The Knights' Saga I" in 2002 and "The Knights' Saga II" in 2003 were held in the context of the official celebration of Minsk's anniversary. The festival "Ancient Nesvige" took place on July 3–4, 2003, and was timed to coincide with the official festivities celebrating Belarus's Independence Day. The medieval reenactors' festival "Novopolotsk 2003" was held on the day of the town anniversary celebration with the support of the local authorities. Official electronic media pub-

licize reenactors' festivals: in 2003 the STV (the capital television channel) organized a live transmission from the festival. In 2004 the festival "The White Castle" became the basis of a television project with the same title shown on the first national channel.

All of these events testify to the official acceptance of the reenactment movement, showing the nominal rehabilitation of pre-Soviet and off-Russian Belarusian history by the Belarusian authorities as part of the Belarusian past, albeit with a number of "reservations." The Belarusian ideologist S. D. Laptienok admits that knightly culture did exist in Belarusian history and even agrees that "organizing theatrical performances that reproduce the knightly duels of our ancestors and the heroic acts of princes and Belarusian voevodes, virtuous noblemen, and landlords is a useful thing. We must know history."³ However, from the official perspective, their meaning for patriotic education should not be overrated because "the main hero, the people, are left behind the screen in these celebrations, even though, without the heroism and self-sacrifice of the common people those individual heroes would not be possible."⁴

However, individualism and a lack of collective heroic deeds in the knights' tournaments is not the only reason, or the main reason, for official ideology to remain cautious about this period of the Belarusian past. As the reenactors themselves assert, "the reenactor groups' activity has an enormous positive educational impact and is necessary for youth who want to undertake a deep study of the history of Belarus and Europe on the whole."⁵ Such is the exact arrangement of geopolitical coordinates of Belarusianness: "Belarus and Europe on the whole" represented in the knight's tradition make the reenactment questionable in the official perspective. The main conflict between the medieval reenactors and official Belarusianness is symbolic—they appeal to different national ideas backed by different national traditions. In 2001, during the election campaign, the candidate for presidency Siamion Domash attended a medieval reenactment which highlighted the cultural and symbolic sense of his political program: he was in favor of Belarus with European roots. These roots, in turn, imply the political meaning of the reenactor groups themselves as they reconnect today's Belarusians with their forgotten past and revive their Europeanness. Although, as M. Zhbankou and A. Rasinski note, "This past

3 S. D. Laptienok, "Belarus'—voiennyy i npravstvennyy forpost," www.president.gov.by/press14033.html#doc.

4 Ibid.

5 See www.alterego.tut.by/clubs.



Reconstruction of the Knights' Battle. Source: www.kirillgoncharov.com.

has been so deeply forgotten that in order to have it back it should be created anew.”⁶

Possibly, this “newness” of the European Middle Ages in the Belarusian tradition makes it relatively safe from the point of view of official ideology. The original sense of Belarusian knighthood as “our history” emphasized by the reenactors themselves is often replaced by a metaphorical reading of their image. The newspaper *Nasha Niva* published a photo resembling an ideological collage—it depicts Belarusian medieval reenactors and a large Soviet-style Belarusian poster above them “Welcome to the winners of the Battle For The Harvest.” “The Battle For The Harvest” is a classical expression of the Soviet era, currently in Belarus, the winners of this “battle” are honored annually at *Dazhinki*, special festivities at the end of harvest season. This photo in fact expropriates the sense of historical heroic victories and transforms Belarusian knights into symbols of the heroic battle for agricultural production.

At the same time, the authorities use the ideas and “techniques” of the reenactment movement to revive memories of World War II in a similar manner. In 2005 the foundation Afghan Memory (a state organization) ini-

6 Maksim Zhabankov and Anderi Rasinski, “konservativizm v ‘opozdavshei’ stranie,” *Nashe Mnenie* December, 26, 2005, <http://nmnby.org/pub/261205/konservativism.html>.

tiated the creation of the historical and cultural center Stalin's Line. It is a memorial complex of the ancient "Stalin's Line" of fortifications that according to the official version of history was built before World War II to protect Minsk from the western areas. The complex was reconstructed in strict conformity to its former state in the prewar years near the town of Zaslavl (located thirty-five kilometers from Minsk). The concept of the memorial complex is to restore fortified objects from the 1930s and 1940s in order to revitalize the real history of war, to present samples of military machinery, and so on. However, the idea of the complex is not only to create a museum of historical fortification, it also provides its visitors with a reenactment of battles between the Soviet army and Fascist occupiers. These theatrical performances revive the first days of the fascist invasion of Belarus. The idea of such a reenactment is borrowed from the ideas of medieval reenactor groups.⁷ In 2007, the complex's management proposed its territory as the site of the Belarusian Reenactors' Festival. This set a precedent that created historical continuity between the history of heroic knights on the Belarusian lands and the more recent events of World War II. Thus, in the context of official Belarusianness, "Belarusian knights" are interpreted as the historical predecessors of those who won the Great Patriotic War in the twentieth century. Presented in this way, the reenactment movement loses its "geopolitical implications," and "knights" as a manifestation of Belarusian Europeanness are reworked into Belarusian phenomena without connoting a wider cultural tradition.

The reasons why the authorities periodically "receive" Belarusian reenactors on their territory might differ. First, the period of time in question is rather distant and thus appears safer in the Belarusian consciousness than the film *Misterium Occupation*, which touches upon the events of the relatively recent war. Second, the conflict between the two Belarusian traditions—the one manifested by the knights and the one advocated by official culture—becomes resolved in official initiatives by a rereading of the

7 Popularization of history by means of historical reconstruction is not an exclusively Belarusian skill. The largest living history museum in the world is located in Williamsburg, Virginia, which is the restored eighteenth-century capital of Britain's most populous outpost of empire in the New World. It consists of hundreds of restored, reconstructed, and historically furnished buildings that re-create the historic era. The conception of this reconstruction, according to the foundation's mission statement, is to vivify the "Becoming Americans" theme and to "tell how diverse peoples, having different and sometimes conflicting ambitions, evolved into a society that valued liberty and equality. [...] In this historic place, we help the future learn from the past."

See www.colonialwilliamsburg.com.

knights' history in their own way. Deprived of their civilizational (European) context, Belarusian knights are transformed into brave Belarusian ancestors with no other meaning. Besides, the performance and spectacle character of the festivals organized by the reenactors makes these events more entertaining than reflective. For an unaware mass spectator, the "idea" is hidden behind the thick curtain of visual effects. It is the richness of various effects of medieval reenactor festivals—their medieval music in original and modern arrangements, old Belarusian cuisine, and a combination of sport competitions with artistic decorations characteristic of the tournaments—that makes the festivals attractive to the masses.

However, the main reason for favorable treatment of the reenactors' activities on the part of official culture may be the fact that such a "sporadic" manifestation of alternative Belarusianness cannot compete with the work of the state machine working on the symbolic reification of the official Belarusianness.

The Official Politics of Identity: Social Reification Strategy

In the official cultural space there are some examples that can be considered in the context of representation of the national idea. As cases of such cultural support provided by official cultural activity to the national state ideology, this chapter considers the annual Slavonic Bazaar festival, the national historical “blockbuster” *Anastasia Slutskaya* (2003), and the performance of *Dreams About Belarus* (2007) on the stage of the Belarusian Academic National Theater. These examples demonstrate how the authorities try to use culture and the cultural sphere to popularize ideas of the official ideology of Belarusianness. However, it is not culture that carries the main functions. The major means of public representations of official Belarusianness looks different from those of the followers’ of alternative Belarusianness.

The beginning of the Slavonic Bazaar festival in Vitebsk goes back to Soviet times. Today, the name itself serves to actualize and popularize the idea of Slavonic unity. Traditionally, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian celebrities are invited. The event is decorated with elements of national (folk) culture (with exhibitions of traditional crafts of Belarusian artisans in the streets of the city). A competition among young musicians is included in the program. In general, however, the concerts of the Bazaar are a reproduction of the Soviet concepts of pop-music celebrities. One of the main leitmotifs of the performances and the greeting of post-Soviet popstars is reminiscent of a time when we lived happily in “one country and were one Soviet people.”

Filmed in 2003 under the patronage of the president of the Republic of Belarus, *Anastasia Slutskaya* was financed from the state budget and initially announced as the first “national historical blockbuster.” It did not become a convincing national myth, although the ideology and national idea presented in the film were initially identified. This found reflection not so much in the events shown in the film as in the way they were presented. The director of the film Yuri Elhov said in an interview: “As regards the ideology, we thought about how to give the film a patriotic character. Not without reason, in one scene, Anastasia calls the people to fight ‘for the

Slutsk land and the Orthodox faith.' But we tried to completely avoid acute political angles. Because of their mentality, Belarusians have not had serious quarrels with anyone or serious wars for national independence in the course of history. [...] There were no conflicts with either Russia or Poland in the film [...] We avoided such political scandals. It was a matter of principle. We did not want to irritate anyone."¹

The image of the national past in the film is built on a denial of historical truth—one can say that national history “abandoned” the film. On the demand of the authorities, the authors of the film offered a national myth that did not contain what was in Belarusian history; neither historical Belarusian symbols—the emblem of Chase, nor Litvins, nor wars with the “fraternal Russian people.” As a result of the loss of all references to the past, the film became a “naive romantic legend from the life of a strange people in colored clothing.”² Despite the fact that the film was placed into distribution and was seen everywhere including in remote Belarusian villages, because of emasculated relations with real history it turned into a more or less qualitative analogue of Hollywood fairytales.

A certain interpretation of Belarusianness appears on the official theater stage, for example, in the performance of *Dreams About Belarus* at the Belarusian Academic National Theater. The performance was staged by Uladzimir Savitski after the play *The Cradle of Four Enchantresses*, by Uladzimir Karatkevich in 2007.

Despite its direct dependence on official ideologists, this theater has managed to remain the most politically democratic from the perspective of its repertoire. On its stage one can see *Prince Vitovt*, written by Alexei Dudarev in 1993, where Russian–Belarusian history is interpreted in manner quite oppositional in relation to the doctrine of the Union State. Here one can also see a performance of *Locals* (Tuteishia) by Kupala, with a white-red-white flag in the finale, “the last safety valve of the nationally minded intelligentsia,” according to the *Belgazeta* weekly.³ The new performance *Dreams About Belarus* can be considered if not officially ordered, in any case officially approved, and staged by means of budget allocations in order to represent the idea of Belarusianness.

The main protagonist of the play is the national poet of Belarus, one of the symbols of twentieth-century Belarusian culture, Yanka Kupala. On

1 Yuri Elkhov, “Interv’iu,” *Belgazeta*, July 07, 2003, www.belgazeta.by/20030707.25/010062252.

2 M. Zbankov, “Mif protiv mifa,” <http://nmnby.org/articles/230204/myth.html>.

3 Andrei Kureichik, “Krasnaia kniga belorusskogo teatra,” *Belgazeta*, July 28, 2007, www.belgazeta.by/20030728.28/400112002.

the one hand, the poet belonged to the first generation of Nasha Niva activists, and his creative work reflected the social oppression and suffering of the people on Belarusian lands. At the same time, he exemplifies a lifting of the contradiction between the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods of the national development of Belarusianness. The poet of the early twentieth-century national revival later became the national poet of Soviet Belarus. His death in 1943 in a Moscow hotel still has no definite explanation, the official version being suicide.

The first scene is in the Moscow Hotel with a message about the death of the Belarusian poet. The end of Yanka Kupala's life is replaced with scenes from his youth, actually portrayed in the dreams he sees before death. His parents, his first love, his thoughts about the land are the background against which the mind of the future poet experiences pangs of realization of his Belarusianness that separate him from those around him who have more mundane concerns about housekeeping and family. In his youth he already had a sense of foreshadowing of a special mission, a clear understanding of which he was to obtain. "He would be one of those whose mission is to create anew, from the ashes, from nothing and oblivion—Belarus." This sounds like a projection of the role played by the people's intelligentsia in the awakening of Belarusian self-consciousness.

Remarkably, the theme of national revival is articulated here in the context of anti-Polish intentions—the anti-Polish phrases of a Belarusian noble-rebel; concealed dislike of the Polish language; a passing joke disclosing the anti-Polish mood of the Belarusian peasants. Specifically, Polish influence is seen in the performance as a problem for the full development of Belarusianness. This point of view quite agrees with the idea of the threat of denationalization for Belarusians on the part of its western neighbor, although it does seem true for the period described. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Belarusian lands had been part of the Russian empire for more than 200 years. Polish culture was devoid of institutional support and though it found itself in a better position than Belarusian culture, it did not prevail in this territory. The threat of denationalization on the part of Polish culture is still less topical today, when the majority of Belarusians speak Russian and for more than eighty years, the Belarusian cultural territory has remained within the sphere of active Russian cultural influence, having experienced a period of common "Sovietness." *Dreams About Belarus* brings us no closer to the essential problems of Belarusian national life but rather takes us away from them, shifting our attention to what has no relation to modern life, having taken place in the distant past. It is just a safe, not very topical talk about the search for

Belarusianness. The lack of vivid, significant acts of cultural representations of official Belarusianness and the tradition on which it is based is filled with constant and laborious actualizations of social rituals at the micro and macro levels of everyday life.

Paul Connerton writes: "If there is such a thing as social memory [...] we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies; but commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative only in so far as they are performative; performativity cannot be thought without a concept of habit; and habit cannot be thought without bodily automatism."⁴ It is social rituals that lead to the automatism and nonreflexive level of evidence the identification of Belarusians with the state and ideology.

At the macro level social rituals are connected with national holidays and symbols. The official version of the national idea gave an ideological interpretation of an event so "basic" that it would not even seem possible to give it an alternative "reading," for example, identifying Independence Day. Independence Day is celebrated in Belarus neither on the day of signing the Declaration of Sovereignty, July 27 (as it was before 1996), nor on the day of the first proclamation of the Belarusian state (Belarusian People's Republic) on March 25 (which the opposition celebrates as "Freedom Day"), but on July 3, the day of Belarus's liberation from German fascist invaders. The main reason for changing Independence Day to July 3, according to the authorities, was that, for most people, the Declaration of Sovereignty is associated with the collapse of the USSR, which by no means can arouse positive emotions. And the Belarusian People's Republic is considered to be "a state that existed only by word of mouth." In reality, in both the first and second cases, "independence" primarily implies liberation from the external influence and presence of the eastern neighbor. The celebration of Independence Day on the day of liberation from the fascist occupation entirely obliterates the context of independence from Russia and substitutes the context of "independence" from the military occupation. At the same time, the government is not confused by the tautology: Independence Day becomes a repetition of Victory Day—another ritually significant national holiday. This tautology, justified ideologically as the participation of Belarusians in the common victory of World War II, is crucial to the Belarusian tradition of collective deeds. Furthermore, May 9 is also celebrated beyond the bounds of the country and July 3 becomes a particular nationalizing act in which Belarusians celebrate Belarus's liberation as their own victory.

4 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4–5.

Another ritually meaningful “national holiday” example is the Day of the State Emblem and the State Flag. It is known, that decorative elements of the national culture, such as the national anthem, flag, serve as an effective means of identification with the state. The present state symbols were introduced in 1995 as a result of the referendum initiated by the president. In the new symbols their succession from the symbols and flag of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic is easily seen. They replaced the historical white-red-white flag and emblem—the “chase,” which in the period from 1991 to 1995 served as state symbols of independent Belarus. These became alternative symbols, which are used by the political and cultural opposition, and prohibited from being displayed or carried in public places under Belarusian law as “not officially registered by the state.”

The Day of the State Emblem and the Flag is held in Belarus according to all of the rules of ritual “memory” encoded in the symbols. “The emblem and flag are relics of the fatherland. They symbolize the succession of generations and consolidate society in the name of creating a strong and flourishing Belarus.”⁵ As Belarusian symbols represent slightly transformed symbols of the Soviet epoch, the “succession of generations” unambiguously means a connection with the Soviet epoch, although “Sovietness” does not exhaust the whole meaning of the new state symbols. In the words of A. Mitrofanova, “The Belarusian state symbols are undoubtedly transformed Soviet ones, but the fact that they are transformed is more important than the fact that they are Soviet ones. On the Belarusian emblem in the rays of sunshine, no hammer and sickle appear, but [...] the contour of its own territory. Soviet legacy is used in such a way, that people have an opportunity to be proud of their own country and not of the country that had already become part of history.”⁶

The official symbols lack deep historical roots but this defect is compensated by a scaled ritualization of its celebration. The State Emblem and Flag days are celebrated by relevant official ceremonies and informal activities. These include not only “pioneer parades” and meetings with official speakers but also large concerts with the participation of popstars, the launching of balloons imprinted with the state Belarusian flag and emblem, and grandiose spectacular fireworks. Organized according to the rules of all mass holidays, the day of national symbols turns into a holiday in which one way or another everybody takes part.

5 A. Lukashenka, “Pozdravlenie s dnev gosudarstvennogo gerba i gosudarstvennogo flaga”, May 2007, <http://www.president.gov.by/press44726.html#doc>.

6 Anastasia Mitrofanova, “Khrustalnyi sosud ideologii, ili belorusskii proekt,” <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2006/47/mi15.html>.

The topic of patriotic education of young generations has become part of state publishing policy aimed at education. In 2004, the textbook *Belarus', Nasha Rodina. Podarok Prezidenta Respuliki Belarus' A. G. Lukashenka Pervoklassniku*. (Belarus, Our Motherland. A gift of the President of the Republic of Belarus A. G. Lukashenka to a First-grader) was published. This book is distributed annually to every first-grader in the country as a gift. Traditionally, the book begins the first lesson of first-graders in Belarusian schools. In 2007 its circulation was 92,000 copies. The publishing house also prepared a book *Tol'ko pod nebom Otechestva* (Only Under the Sky of the Fatherland), released an educational and methodological textbook *Na poroge grazhdanskoï zrelosti* (On the Threshold of Civic Maturity), and a reader *Moia Otchizna. Respublika Belarus'* (My Fatherland. The Republic of Belarus.) In 2007 it was decided to publish the book *Ia Grazhdanin Respubliki Belarus'* (I Am a Citizen of the Republic of Belarus) for distribution to sixteen-year-olds with their passports. The book is planned to be a richly illustrated gift edition that presents the basic premises of the constitution of the Republic of Belarus, legal commentaries, and quotations of renowned persons. Attached to the book will be an informational disc, containing reference information (interpretations of laws, addresses of law offices, universities, etc.), and a music disc containing masterpieces of Belarusian classical music.

The main task of social rituals is to form individual-level perceptions of the sense of belonging to Belarus (as it exists in the official doctrine). To achieve this, national holidays in official Belarus are combined with various practices that actualize official Belarusianness in everyday life. (Not without reason Lukashenka is sometimes called “the master of micro policy.”⁷) These are all connected with the institutionalization of the national project, which by nature becomes a symbolic reification of official Belarusianness. This national project is introduced through public institutions at all levels: schools, universities, and work collectives. At the first lesson of the school academic year, called “Belarus is my Motherland,” children not only listen to stories about “their country” but also draw pictures of the national symbols. The state emblem and flag are popularized in the youth environment, for example, by using cloth containing state symbols to create fashionable pieces of clothing. Once in the supermarket I saw a twelve-year-old boy, who, when asked what he wanted for his birthday as a present, he said “a scarf with the Belarusian flag.” Many state organizations have “red corners” with the text of the state anthem, an image of the emblem, and also a “political

7 Ibid.

information corner.” Almost all stores are decorated with national flags—little paper flags are placed on almost every cash register and counter. The broadcasts of the two central television channels, BTV (Belarusian TV) and National Television end with the sounds of the state anthem.

In order to develop and consolidate the feeling of national unity in Belarusian society, an action, “Let’s sing the anthem together,” was intended to be performed on Independence Day, July 3, 2007, at 22:45, immediately after the two-hour concert “For Independent Belarus” with the participation of stars of the official Belarusian scene. The collective performance of the national anthem by all those who attended the festive concerts in the squares of Minsk and other large towns was televised by all of the Belarusian channels.

The state program of Belarusian tourism development is aimed at internalizing the official Belarusian idea. Traveling throughout the country, Belarusians become familiar with the state territory as “their own country.” The contour of the country appears on the state emblem as well as on all publicly displayed propaganda posters. These signs of national institutionalization under state patronage are exhibited in the entire public area of modern Belarus. For example, as in the name of the new National Library building, the word “national” is applied to the majority of significant institutions. Domestic policy devotes significant attention to those spheres of life such as sport and music that make Belarus “visible” in the international arena and develop national feelings at home.

E. Hobsbawm wrote that “sport as a mass spectacle was transformed into the unending succession of gladiatorial contests between persons and teams symbolizing state-nations.”⁸ He considered sport a good functional means of “bridging” the gap between the individual and public dimensions of national identity. The fact that sportsmen become “modern national heroes” in Belarus is not exceptional: ritualization of the national identity in sport contests is a common feature today. However, Belarusian athletes playing for “the state” under the official national flag not only strengthen the connection between the individual space of each spectator and “the national self” of Belarus. At the same time, they consolidate the perception of official Belarusianness and weaken alternative Belarusianness in the mass consciousness. The same can be said about music contests, albeit on a slightly smaller scale. The young Belarusian girl Ksenia Sitnik won the Eurovision Junior 2006 contest and immediately found herself among the

8 E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 142.

“national heroes” of official Belarus. Her portrait can be seen side by side with that of Maksim Mirny (Belarusian tennis player) in the series of portraits “For Belarus” exhibited everywhere in Belarusian towns.

All of these mechanisms have made the official Belarusian symbols working instruments for the expression of patriotic feelings. Belarusian journalist A. Znatkevitch describes the strange combination of the official Belarusian flag with an opposition slogan.

Once, while walking via the underpass near the Minsk railway station, I noticed a lot of policemen and heard the mighty slogan “Long Live Belarus!” I was surprised, as I had not heard about any political protest at the railway station. It turned out that football fans were escorting the Moscow guests to their train. The Belarusian team had lost to their Russian opponents that day.

Most young people come to the games with red-green flags. And this may not be only because the police go after the white-red-white flag. Certain Belarusian youth seem to perceive this red-green flag as a natural sign of patriotism.”⁹

Anthropologist John Bornerman’s distinction between “nationalism” and “nationness” may be helpful. He defines “nationalism” as conscious sentiments that view the nation as an object of active devotion, and “nationness” as daily interactions and practices that produce an inherent and often unarticulated feeling of belonging, of being at home.¹⁰ These practices and routines may vary from the “relatively mundane rituals of courtship and family-making, as influenced by the policies of the state to the relatively rare and spectacular, such as participation in warfare, which may have been essential to building devotion to the nation during the early-modern period so that such devotion could be presupposed by war-makers later on.”¹¹ This approach to the individual aspect of the national identity refers to Foucault’s idea about the formation of the modern subject through often invisible practices—the microphysics of power. To study this means to redirect attention away from the straight rhetoric of nationalists

9 The slogan traditionally used at the opposition’s rallies. Aliaksei Znatkevitch, “Tsiashkaia navuka palitkarektnasti,” in *“Viasna narodu” Eseiastyka 1991–2007* (Vilnius: Nasha Niva, 2007), 301.

10 John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 339.

11 Katherine Verdery, “Whither ‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism’?” *Daedalus* (Summer 1993): 41.

and toward the techniques and tools through which receptive dispositions have been unconsciously internalized by those to whom they appeal.

Indeed, all of the various practices are nothing but instruments of embedding the attributes of official Belarusianness into people's notions about "their country." The ideas of official Belarusianness are expressed in national form and become the national idea, the idea of belonging to the Belarussian nation as the titular nation of the Republic of Belarus. At the same time, institutionalization of the official Belarussian idea works not only in the representation of some mythological (or ideological) content. It constitutes the existence of a Belarussian nation that practically "finds itself" in the signs of the representation. Belarusianness is reified by means of symbolic institutionalization and social ritualization. The longer such a state of affairs exists during this political regime, the more difficult it is for the majority of Belarussians to deny their support, which would mean leaving the territory of Belarusianness that constantly affirms itself as the only legitimate space of Belarusianness. Furthermore, in these processes, certain ideas concerning the arrangement of social and political life become part of the foundation of Belarussian national unity. And as was shown above, some of these ideas were inscribed into the symbolic matrix of Belarusianness long before the Lukashenka regime was established, and even before the Soviet state was created. The first articulations of Belarusianness by national awakeners were closely connected with the ideas of social justice and class equality based on the historical conditions in which they worked. For this reason, there are no apparent conflicts between the official national idea and the way the majority of Belarussians have been taught to understand what Belarusianness is about.

One can also find attempts to institutionalize alternative Belarussianness. For example, the Yakub Kolas Lyceum was an alternative educational institution, where teaching was conducted entirely in Belarussian. The general cultural context of the curriculum was different from that in state-run schools. The lyceum was opened in 1989 by members of the Belarussian intelligentsia who strove to emphasize Belarussian culture and history. In 1991 the lyceum was converted into a Belarussian humanities education and cultural center of the Ministry of Education, which included the lyceum, a publishing house, and a cinema and video studio. The center had six branches in a number of towns in Belarus. But the Ministry of Education closed down the center in summer 2003. At that time, there were 30 teachers and 130 pupils, and since then the lyceum has practically gone underground, conducting lessons as preparatory courses in private homes and on the premises of public organizations that sympathize with its activities. The

lyceum is widely supported abroad. Its graduates receive grants for further education in other countries. But its elimination completed the monopolization of Belarus's official educational landscape.

The political opposition aspires to popularize "alternative holidays" connected with historical events of the Belarusian past, thus creating its own calendar. This calendar contains the day of establishment of the Belarusian People's Republic in 1918 (March 25), commemoration of the victory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's troops in the battle of Orsha over Muscovy in 1514 (September 8). Remarkably, in 1992 on that day in Independence Square in Minsk, the oath of allegiance to their people was administered to Belarusian soldiers. It was the symbolic start of legalization and institutionalization of the new version of Belarusian history in the state's life. When A. Lukashenka came to power this version became oppositional, and the date of September 8 has retained its significance only on the alternative calendar of Belarusian history. Since then, this day is annually celebrated in the Krapivenski field in the vicinity of Orsha by a singer-songwriter festival,¹² medieval reenactments, and divine services of praise to Belarusian warriors who fought against Muscovy.

Every November since 1992, members of the Belarusian Popular Front and a number of cultural organizations have held a kind of tour of the sites of the Slutsk uprising in 1920. The Slutsk uprising was the first armed attempt to protect the independence of Belarus in November–December 1920. For about forty-five days 10–12,000 Belarusian patriots in the troops of the Belarusian People's Republic fought against the Red Army in the final stage of the Soviet–Polish war of 1919–20. The uprising was held under the slogan "Neither Polish Pans nor Moscow Communists!" Visits to these places are revive the memories of the Belarusian past during which Belarusians acted independently and demonstrated their aspiration to freedom from outside domination. In this context, according to oppositional activist Viacheslav Sivchik, "the struggle of Slutsk insurgents is a link in the chain of the Belarusian national and liberation movement, together with such events as the rising of Kastus Kalinouski, the fight of the national and liberation forces against the Bolsheviks, the anti-Nazi partisan movement during World War II, and the current struggle of democratic forces for freedom and democracy."¹³

12 Website of the Orsha Fest, <http://vorshafest.googlepages.com>.

13 Naviny, "V Belarusi organizovano kraevedcheskoe puteshestvie po mestam Sluckogo vosstania 1920 goda," November 24, 2007, http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2007/11/24/ic_news_116_281032.

All of these attempts to actualize ideas of an alternative past and alternative Belarusianness, however, give way in confrontation with the official version. Alternative history is popularized on Internet websites, books are published, competitions of children's pictures are held, trips organized, and documentaries produced.¹⁴ Music, theater, cinema, literature, historians, and reconstruction clubs interact and often work together for a common idea. Knights are present at concerts and in films, musicians take part in the Free Theater performances, historians work with knight clubs and filmmakers. All of these events, however, remain locked in the parallel sphere of the public space. Not mentioned in the media, memorable dates of alternative history are not described in the press and not studied in schools.

The main and insuperable advantage of official over alternative Belarusianness is its access to state institutional resources. The official "tradition" learned in schools and universities is supported by official holidays, while official symbols are also used by the international community to identify Belarus. The fact that official Belarusianness has become a synonym for the Belarusian state gives it an essential advantage over alternative Belarusianness. The Belarusian authorities are undoubtedly aware of this. That is why the authorities thwart all attempts to institutionalize the alternative Belarusian idea: the humanities lyceum was closed down, the dates of alternative history are not mentioned in the calendar or included in their own actions (e.g., March 25, the day of the official action "For Belarus"). A particular feature of the Belarusian regime is its reluctance to prevent manifestations (signs, attributes, actions) that represent an alternative Belarusianness. It seldom tries to eliminate them. One can buy books with "alternative history" in bookstores, ideologically oppositional Belarusian literature is published. Discs of disfavored musicians are sold in the shops. The Belarusian authorities mainly aim to prevent information—any manifestations of the alternative Belarusian idea—from getting into the official public space, which is considered the only legitimate public sphere and is reserved for official Belarusianness.

I once witnessed an illustrative conflict involving national symbols:

14 Documentaries form another sphere of opposition Belarusian cultural development that is actively involved in politics. Viktor Dashuk (*Reportage from the Rabbit's Cage*), Yuri Khashchevatski (*Ploshcha*) show the repressive nature of the Belarusian regime, dealing in their documentaries with political events, filming oppositional rallies, interviewing relatives of politicians and activists who have disappeared, and so on. Other types of documentaries, such as "The Belarusian Post-War Anti-Soviet Resistance 1944–1957" made by the independent Belarusian Partyzanfilm Studio (2008), present the opposition version of history.

during the conference the Wave of Resistance organized by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Alfred Mozer Foundation in The Hague, the hall was adorned with the national flags of the participating countries. The participants were representatives of youth organizations that promote democratization in their countries. Belarus was represented by Zubr—a front of the youth resistance that is not registered officially because of its openly political stand in opposition to the regime. At the very beginning of the conference an embarrassing event took place as the Belarusians representing the opposition refused to participate in the conference “under the regime’s flag.” Indeed, among other national flags was the official Belarusian flag in red and green. It was not the behavior of the Belarusian opposition that was symptomatic in those circumstances. The conference organizers were undoubtedly on the side of the democratic opposition and used the official symbol perhaps without being aware of the war of the national symbols. By not realizing this and just following international rules and using the recognized state symbol the organizers in effect took the state “side.” And this, as a matter of fact, is not a problem of the conference organizers or the international rules, but, rather, the main difficulty of alternative Belarusianness and its followers in their activities, which is more intense inside the country than abroad. They fight to represent the Belarusian nation against the Belarusian state, and they manifest a national Belarusian unity that is separate from the political unit of the same name.

* * *

One aspect of understanding the Belarusian nation is connected with its formal definition. A nation that is shaped and implemented in practice with the help of state institutions and various social practices is a nation of the state. The image of an alternative Belarusianness is built on an appeal to the cultural and symbolic community of the nation based on ethnic legacy. In this context, the results of a sociological study conducted by independent IISEPS specialists in late 2006 are noteworthy. In this opinion poll, respondents were asked to choose one definition of the Belarusian nation from among several variants: a nation as a community of citizens of the Republic of Belarus, a nation as a community of ethnic Belarusians, and a nation as a community of people who live within the cultural Belarusian tradition (who speak Belarusian, observe Belarusian traditions, and educate their children in this spirit). The results of the poll are given in Table 10.

As we can see, no concept of the nation has an absolute majority in Belarusian society. A relative majority adheres to the definition of a civic-nation (38.2 percent), or, as the authors of the study write, “the definition

TABLE 10. *Responses to the Question*
"For you, what is the "Belarusian nation?" (%)

All citizens of Belarus, regardless of their ethnic affiliation, the language they use in communication, and the national tradition they observe	38.2
All ethnic Belarusians, regardless of where they live or the citizenship they possess	26.8
All citizens of Belarus who speak Belarusian, observe Belarusian traditions, and educate their children in these traditions	25.6
Not certain	9.4

Note: National opinion poll conducted in October–November 2006 by IISEPS sociologists by means of face-to-face interviews with 1,527 respondents.

Source: "Chto takoe beloruskaia natsiia," *Arkhiv analitiki IISEPS*, November 2006, www.iiseps.org/11-06.html.

that underlies the policy of European Union members."¹⁵ This is also the definition of the nation embedded in the official Belarusian discourse.

At the same time, Belarusian society has numerous supporters of the definition of nation through ethnicity (26.8 percent), which can be accounted for by the legacy of the Soviet system, in which "nationality" in the passport of each citizens was determined precisely in this manner. Finally, 25.6 percent of the respondents support the definition of the Belarusian nation based on language and cultural traditions.

The fact that a considerable number chose the "cultural definition" of the nation demonstrates the potential for enhancing the influence (but at the same time the "ceiling" of this enhancement) of political supporters of Belarusian cultural nationalism. According to the same opinion poll, only 7.8 percent of respondents speak mainly Belarusian in their everyday life, however, the proportion of people who consider themselves Belarusians to those who speak Belarusian is over three times greater (25.6 percent). This suggests that these people have a definite motivation, a desire to speak Belarusian under more favorable circumstances. These results make it possible to determine how widespread the idea of the nation as a community formed by the state is—an idea that is actively propagandized by the state itself.

Another aspect of understanding of the Belarusian nation investigated by the IISEPS sociologists is related to its "content:" the geopolitical and cultural values that are available in the self-determination of Belarusians. Surveys reveal different formulas of self-determination and definitions of

15 "Chto takoe beloruskaia natsiia," *Arkhiv analitiki IISEPS*, November 2006, www.iiseps.org/11-06.html.

Belarusianness, which form intricate patterns in Belarusians' consciousness. On the one hand, as the 2006 IISEPS opinion poll revealed, 52 percent of Belarusians consider themselves "Soviet people."¹⁶ This striking number speaks in favor of the fact that the reason for the stable character of the Belarusian regime should be searched for not so much in its internal administrative resources (i.e., in the mechanisms of suppressing non-conformists with the aid of special services), as in the peculiar, and for many, paradoxical, correlation of the Belarusian model of self-identification and the national realization with the concept of Belarusianness offered in the official discourse.

At the same time, the results of national representative polls conducted during 2004 and 2005, reveal that "Belarusians practically in everything manifest greater 'Europeanness' than Russians and Ukrainians. [...] Belarusians more frequently consider themselves 'European' and refer to 'Europeanness' as a variant of their self-identification."¹⁷ These polls also show that more Belarusians can define the European Union, and know where the headquarters of the EU are located, as compared to Russians and Ukrainians (see Table 11).

TABLE 11. *Belarusians, Russians, Ukrainians, and "Europe," 2004–2005 (%)*

	Belarus	Russia	Ukraine
Feel themselves considerably/completely European	34	25	26
Seldom/never feel themselves European	54	68	62
Consider themselves European	16	8	10
Support joining the European Union	59	56	54
Can define the European Union	48	39	42
Know where the headquarters of the European Union are based	49	39	36
Believe that the country should join NATO	22	29	22

Source: Roy Allison, Stephen White, Margot Light, "Belarus' mizh Uskhodam i Zakhadam," *ARCHE* no. 10 (2006), <http://arche.bymedia.net/2006-10/alisan610.htm>.

16 "Gdie konchaetsia Evropa," *Arkhiv analitiki IISEPS*, www.iiseps.org/4-06-2.html.

17 Roy Allison, Stephen White, Margot Light, "Belarus' mizh Uskhodam i Zakhadam," *ARCHE* no. 10 (2006). Originally published in the *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21 (4) (2006): 487–511, <http://arche.bymedia.net/2006-10/alisan610.htm>.

If “Europe” is one of the main signifiers of alternative Belarusianness, one can say that in this capacity it also has a great impact on Belarusians’ self-awareness. However, this does not prevent Belarusians from remaining extremely Russian-minded. As the IISEPS opinion polls reveal, during the past few years, even in the conditions of persistent exacerbation of political and economic crisis in relations with Russia, in a forced choice between the East and the West, the majority of Belarusians decidedly prefer Russia.

TABLE 12. *Responses to the Question*
“If you had to choose between unification with Russia and joining
the European Union, what would your choice be?” (%)

Response variant	March 2004	March 2005	April 2006	January 2007
Unification with Russia	41.0	51.9	53.9	48.5
Joining the European Union	36.5	31.6	32.6	33.6
No definite response	22.5	16.5	13.5	17.9

Note: Nationwide representative opinion polls conducted by IISEPS in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007.

Source: “Integratsionnyi perelom,” *Arkhiv analitiki, IISEPS*, January 2007, www.iiseps.org/1-07-6.html.

This phenomenon of the considerable presence of “Europeanness” in Belarusians’ self-image against the background of their no less impressive “Sovietness” and persistent pro-Russianness can be explained in the same way that Christian W. Haerpfer explained the high proportion of democrats in Belarusian society governed by the authoritarian regime.¹⁸ Haerpfer wrote that, although 41 percent of Belarusian citizens are in favor of pluralistic democracy, which is the highest result for the post-Soviet space (second only after Estonia), still, the other 59 percent of the Belarusian electorate are not “democrats.” The paradox of a large number of European-minded Belarusians (34 percent) in the most pro-Russian country can be explained in a similar way: while their numbers may indeed be higher than those of European-minded Russians or Ukrainians, the other 54 percent of Belarusians “seldom” or “never” think of themselves in this way. They determine the stable orientation of society “in general” to the East.

European-Belarusians and Soviet Belarusians comprise a common unity—the Belarusian people—they live in the same places on the same street—sand visit the same shops. They inhabit the same country, but their ideas of

18 Christian W. Haerpfer, “Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared,” 97.

the country are different and they define its place in the surrounding world differently. The competing ideas of “Belarusianness” provide their supporters and adherents with different formulas for building their Belarusian identity. The fact that one is a “state-run” national idea and the other is opposed to the state, by definition, creates unequal conditions in this struggle over identity.



Billboard “For Talented Belarus.” The winner of Eurovision Junior 2006, K. Sitnik, has become a part of the official Belarusianness. *Source:* www.kirillgoncharov.com.



Official poster: Belarus for Independence! On the Blackboard: “I am a citizen of the Republic of Belarus, Motherland, Belarus, Minsk.” *Source:* www.kirillgoncharov.com.

CONCLUSION

In this work I intended to give an alternative interpretation to the theme of the Belarusian national idea and nationalism in the context of the systemic transformation of Belarusian society. The thesis of the weak and undeveloped character of the Belarusian nation has occupied a definite place in the work of Belarusian alternative analysts and Western researchers alike. The emergence of the authoritarian regime and the failure of democratization of Belarusian society are traditionally viewed as both the symptom of a lack of Belarusian identity and the result of weak Belarusian nationalism, which are usually seen as closely interrelated phenomena. Since the first years of Belarusian independence, the disposition of political forces in the country has resulted in the complete merging of “democratization” and “nationalization” rhetoric in the programs of Belarusian parties, whose political failure was assessed as a weakness of the Belarusian nation. The “Belarusian nation” in this context is the nation for which Belarusian nationalists and the Belarusian Popular Front are appealing, a nation of Belarusians opposed to the Soviet experience of Belarussianness. The defeat of political nationalism in the early 1990s made it logical to conclude that there was a deficiency of national identity in the minds of the Belarusian people. At the same time, the Republic of Belarus has a durable status as an antinational state formation. In this context, Belarusian society appears to be divided into two parts: the nationless majority supporting the regime and the Belarusian nation opposing the state. A number of associated factors are usually considered as additional indicators of the Belarusian national identity’s deficiency, such as the idea of building a union state with Russia, linguistic Russification, and, on the whole, the lack of anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiments in society. However, as was shown in Part IV, “Arguments and Paradoxes of Weak Belarusian Identity,” these factors are far from simplistically interrelated. For example, hypothetical consent to a political union with Russia in practice does not signify that Belarusians are prepared to give up their state independence. Linguistic Russification, on the one hand, does not lead to political pro-Russianness; on the contrary, the Belarusian-speaking population mani-

feels greater readiness to integrate with Russia. This can be explained by the fact that alongside with the “conscious” Belarusian-speaking Belarusians in big cities there is also a large number of pro-Russian Belarusian-speaking villagers supporting regime. At the same time, Russian-speaking Belarusians call the Belarusian language their native mother tongue. Many Belarusians do not always distinguish themselves from Russians in terms of cultural identity (they are taught the common history, common traditions and roots of the Belarusian and Russian people). At the same time, they manifest a high “index of pride” in their Belarusianness. Moreover, precisely the part of society that comprises “the denationalized majority” (as the supporters of the current power are usually presented) demonstrates their Belarusian identity as an object of pride and as the main principle of their self-determination. Active consideration of these paradoxes indicates the existence of two different and, in many aspects, contradictory concepts of Belarusianness in present Belarusian political and cultural life.

The research proceeds from the premise that the official Belarusian authorities, despite the openly authoritarian mode of rule and the numerous repressive mechanisms used to suppress dissidence in society, implement their own national project in social and political practice. The official political discourse, the ideology of the Belarusian state, is in fact a specific version of the Belarusian idea. It coexists and competes with the Belarusianness articulated in the nationalist discourse. Approximately half of Belarusian voters support the Belarusian regime, as is revealed in the results of referenda and elections conducted by the Belarusian authorities (independent exit-poll data) and independent opinion polls that assess trust in the Belarusian authorities and the official course of political and economic development, and confidence in official information sources. As a matter of fact, these data enable us to estimate the degree to which the ideas and basic formulations of the official concept of Belarusianness reflect the self-perceptions prevalent in Belarusian society.

In this situation, a justified question arises: is the given phenomenon of confidence in official policy and the ideas of Belarusian development articulated by the authorities a consequence of official policy in the sphere of “ideology of identity” of Belarusians or, on the contrary, do Belarusians support the authorities’ policy namely because the ideas and values that the authorities articulate correspond to their own ideas and values? In Belarusian society a situation has formed, in which, for many Belarusians, the idea of Belarusianness, formulated in the official discourse, is familiar and relevant, in the same manner that the ideas of the opposition political discourse appear to be familiar and appropriate for others.

The official and alternative projects of the Belarusian nation differ not only in content but also in their realization of different strategies of nation-representation (nation-articulation and nation-reification). Partly for this reason it has proved impossible to study Belarusianness from the standpoint of a separate theory of nation. The alternative project of Belarusianness is formulated in terms of ethnocultural unity, in which context the Belarusian nation is embedded in medieval history, its symbolic capital founded on the Golden Age of the seventeenth century, and the legacy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The idea of European Belarus, or the image of Belarus as a civilizational intermediary between Russia and Europe, makes it possible for supporters of alternative Belarusianness to remove Belarus from the sphere of Russia's civilizational attraction, and, consequently, to formulate its future strategy, which in principle differs from that proposed in the current official discourse. An application of this scale of Belarusianness to the history of the twentieth century caused the justifiable (from this perspective) negation of any significance of Soviet history in the formation of Belarusianness. Historical mythology serves as a symbolical foundation for alternative Belarusianness; it is based on the purposeful reorientation of Belarusianness to the "West" and "the return" of the Belarusian nation to Europe.

This work is an attempt to show that the problems of legitimation of alternative Belarusianness in the perception of Belarusian society are related, first of all, to the underestimation of the constructive role played by the Soviet state, its institutions, and social practices in the formation of Belarusianness. In talking about the "return," the adherents of European Belarusianness actually mean a complete reformatting of the Belarusian nation that has been shaped in a different civilizational context and on different sociosystemic bases. Nations within the Soviet state appeared, on the one hand, to be a result of the institutionalization of ethnic communities, and on the other hand, a result of the processes of their modernization and industrialization, although in a non-Western way. The Belarusian nation of the Soviet era resulted from numerous processes of social engineering and institutional reification (standardization, education, correction of history, inclusion of the national formula in the self-description of Soviet people, etc.) against the background of society's modernization. Not accidentally, this constructive aspect of Soviet national policy and the role of the Soviet state in the legalization, institutionalization, and actual creation of the Belarusian nation and other post-Soviet nations is often emphasized by adherents of the modernist approach to nation study. Meanwhile, the framework of the socialist system and ideology has left its imprints on the

content of *Belarusianness*. Representatives of the Belarusian national movement of the late twentieth century preferred to ignore it, instead of applying their efforts to a detailed reshaping of some aspects of Soviet *Belarusianness* in the public awareness with which they were confronted during the first years of independence. They selected a principally new counter-formula of *Belarusianness* formulated analogously with other East European national ideas on the basis of non-Soviet history of Belarusians.

The official national project, the national idea articulated by the Belarusian authorities, was built on an appeal to Soviet experience, which enabled them to use the mobilizational resource of national awareness connected with the Soviet era that involved a multitude of symbolic ties. The official discourse of *Belarusianness* finds support for its legitimacy in the Soviet legacy in content as well as in technical means. In order to promote official *Belarusianness*, the authorities resort to the tools of social reification borrowed from Soviet practice. The Belarusian idea in the official interpretation comprises basic truths of socialist ideology. For example, collectivism and social equality are interpreted here as "features of the national Belarusian character." As was shown in Part II, "The Rise and Development of the Belarusian National idea," the combination of national and socialist ideas in the symbolic matrix of *Belarusianness* was stipulated not so much by the Soviet era as by the preceding period of the emergence of the Belarusian national movement in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. These ideas were later developed in the practices of Soviet statehood. Accordingly, the Soviet period of Belarusian history is interpreted in the official discourse of *Belarusianness* as one of nation building. At the same time, in the sphere of alternative discourse, the concepts of "Sovietness" and "Belarusianness" appear within the rigid dichotomy "either [...] or." A. Milinkevich, the democratic opposition candidate for president in the 2006 elections, built his television appeal on the distinction between his identity and that of the incumbent president: "he is a Soviet man, and I am a Belarusian."¹ However, independent opinion polls show that a considerable number of Belarusians include "Sovietness" in their self-description, easily combining it with "Belarusianness."

Another aspect of the struggle for Belarusian identity in Belarusian society concerns the strategic issues of its public manifestation and symbolic reification. The major problem of alternative *Belarusianness* is its opposition to the independent state of Belarus. On the one hand, this means a

1 Naviny, "A. Milinkevich: Ne stabilnost' zastoia, a stabilnost' razvitiia,"

February 23, 2006, http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2006/02/23/ic_articles_112_134092.

lack of access to the institutional resources of the state, which, as modernist nation theorists affirm and as Soviet experience demonstrated, has great nation-building resources as a tool of social reification of the nation at the micro and macro levels of social life. On the other hand, it also means a loss of symbolic identification with the signs of official Belarusian statehood that highlight Belarus within the country as well as internationally. Official Belarusianness (quite often independent of ideology) is reified in numerous social practices and civil rituals that run through the life of every state. In current conditions, any events that traditionally contribute to the formation of the individual's bond with the national community—such as numerous international, children's, and sports competitions, Olympic games, Eurovision, the Miss World contest, and so on—work toward the establishment and support of official Belarusianness.

The main difference between the national identity and other forms of collective identity (e.g., city squatters, ecological movements, feminist groups, human rights activists, etc.) is that “these latter are built in the opposition to the state.”² Meanwhile, national identity cannot be formed in such opposition. It does not arise spontaneously or locally, “it has to be learned and acquired, and that is why a comprehensive institutional support (schools, educational companies, mass media) is important for its formation.”³

Alternative Belarusianness is represented by different political and cultural manifestations, while its status in the public space is reduced to that of a counterculture. Rock concerts, the alternative (actually underground) cinema, youth clubs, and the independent press (often supplanted from the official media space by the authorities) are the territories in which alternative Belarusianness exists and “realizes itself.” Understandably, this strategy has insufficient resources to win the unequal struggle for Belarusian identity in the mass consciousness within the process of national identity construction. Alternative Belarusianness as a foundation for national self-determination appears to be embedded in political opposition to the Belarusian regime. It becomes a result of the conscious political choice of every person, while official Belarusianness proves to be embedded in the consciousness of those seemingly not involved in politics, for whom it suffices to watch news programs, music contests, or sports events, supporting the national team to “slide” to the side of official Belarusian-

2 Natividad Gutiérrez, “The Study of National Identity,” in *Modern Roots. Studies of National Identity*, ed. Alain Dieckhoff and Natividad Gutiérrez (Burlington, VT and Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001), 8–9.

3 Ibid.

ness. Paradoxically, the ideas of alternative Belarusianness, which are far less politicized in essence (with the underlying concept of the nation as a cultural and historical unit) can exist in Belarusian society only as part of a specific oppositional political doctrine. At the same time, in contemporary Belarusian conditions, official Belarusianness, based on the foundation of utterly ideologized Soviet legacy, is easily extrapolated to the consciousness of those who, at first glance, live outside politics and ideology.

A specific feature of the struggle for identity is its perpetuity—identity is a process that is never completed. It enables us to believe that the disposition of forces in the official versus alternative Belarusianness opposition, as it currently exists, is not final. Future developments in the country, for instance, a probable shift of emphasis in the official political discourse or new strategies in the sphere of alternative Belarusianness, can cause changes on the “map” of Belarusian identities.

The struggle for Belarusian identity has become closely interrelated with the struggle against the authoritarian regime. “National awakening” is considered by Belarusian opposition leaders to be the main precondition for the democratization of the country. Consequently, the rhetoric of national revival in the Belarusian public sphere functions as a major instrument for attracting people to the struggle against authoritarianism. Belarusian democratic and nationalist forces, however, lack the necessary institutional resources to facilitate putting their idea of a Belarusian nation into social practice. At the same time, the Belarusian regime, unlike the political and cultural opposition, has enormous institutional resources at its disposal, so it is easily able to promulgate its idea of Belarusianness. From this perspective, it appears highly unlikely that a democratization of the Belarusian political system and a liberalization of society will ever result from the effective “nationalization” of Belarusians’ own consciousness in the meaning implied by nationalists.

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The monograph describes how the ethno-symbolic nation of the Belarusian nationalists, based on the cultural capital of the Golden Age of the Belarusian past (17th century) competes with the 'nation' institutionalized and reified by the numerous civic rituals and social practices under the auspices of the actual post-Soviet Belarusian state.

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